

# SYNERGY MAGAZINE

Exploring the Boundaries of Entertainment

Volume 3: No.1





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Science Fiction

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# THE THREE LAWS OF ROBOTICS



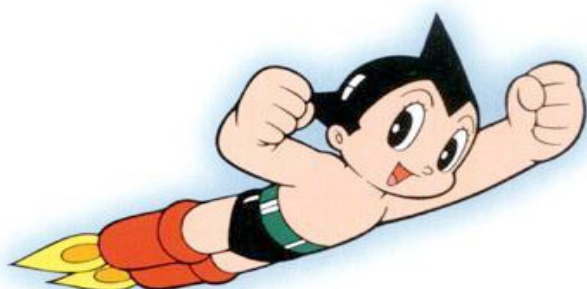
*1. A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction allow a human being to come to harm.*

*2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.*

*3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.*

*Handbook of Robotics*





*Welcome to the first issue of Synergy for 2010.*

What an exciting year we have planned for you.

We have refined our presentation of Synergy with a more "journal-like" look, easier to read headings and, of course, lots more reviews.

Our first issue is a superb guide to Science Fiction with a special emphasis on Robots.

We then move into sex and sleaze with *Sin-ema*, a very adults only issue. So lock you doors and turn down the lights.

Following *Sin-ema* we will move on to *Cinematic Contraband*, which will examine the whole gambit of "exploitation" cinema from Women in

Prison to extreme horror, Cannibal films to the Ilsa phenomena, cult films to the just plain weird.

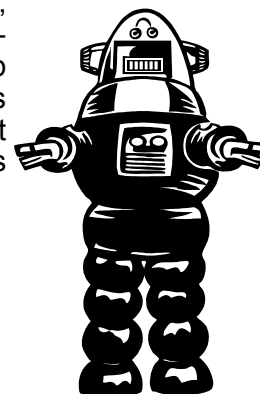
These are just a taste of what we have in store for 2010 with each issue packing lots of features.

We have decided to increase the feature content of every issue of Synergy so you will be treated to a lot more guides, director profiles, film studies and in depth coverage.

Of course we will not loose track of our goal to give you lots and lots of reviews as well; from books and DVDS to strange and wonderful toys and art.

Each issue will also include specialized DVD review sections on Cult, Horror, Comedy and Erotica, so you can just skip straight to your fav reviews if you like, but don't forget to read the other reviews too !

**Editorial Team  
Synergy**





### SYNERGY MAGAZINE

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**Managing Editor:** Bob Estreich  
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Synergy Magazine reviews DVDs from all regions. The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA  
2 = UK  
3 = Asia  
4 = Australia  
0 = All region.

#### DVD-R

DVD-R refers to titles which have not been formally released on DVD but release via specialty DVD firms.

NTSC or PAL is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

#### Blu Ray

We review Blu Rays from all regions; we will clearly list the region (or region free) on each disc.



The best reference site for Blu Ray is <http://www.blu-ray.com>. It includes lots of details

about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

If you require an ALL region DVD and Blu-ray player, we recommend you look at the Kogan Blu-ray player (<http://www.kogan.com.au>)

For Adult titles, we include an extra reference **(E)** for explicit, **(M)** for mature. Adult content within mainstream titles will be mentioned in reference.

#### Publication Details

##### Print and Digital Editions

Six issues a year.

##### Online

Daily Updates

##### Website

<http://www.synergy-magazine.com>

The print and digital edition of Synergy Magazine is published six times a year and includes all the reviews from the website from the preceding months with extra materials, articles and features extended reviews, added images, screen shorts and special competitions. Features, articles and competitions only appear in the digital and print editions.

#### Digital Edition Special Conditions

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The Digital Edition cannot be altered or articles used without permission, except as copyright allows. Synergy does give permission for companies supplying titles for review to use the given review in their own publicity as long as our details are included with every use.

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The movie posters used are believed to be within the public domain, please notify us of any corrections.



## GIVEAWAYS

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### **Star Trek: Legends of the Final Frontier 10 Film/ 12 DVD Special Edition Collection Paramount 2009**

Own the entire classic Star Trek movie series with this exciting collection featuring the first ten Star Trek films with room for the new blockbuster Star Trek film by director J.J. Abrams! This is a must have for old and new fans alike!

#### **Star Trek - The Motion Picture**

An alien phenomenon of unprecedented size and power is approaching Earth, destroying everything in its path. The only star ship in range is the U.S.S. Enterprise--still in dry-dock after a major overhaul. As Captain Decker readies his ship and his crew to face this menace, the legendary Admiral James T. Kirk arrives with orders to take command of the Enterprise and intercept the intruder.

But it has been three years since Kirk last commanded the Enterprise on its historic five year mission...is he up to the task of saving the Earth?

#### **Star Trek II - The Wrath Of Khan**

It is the 23rd century. The Federation Starship U.S.S. Enterprise is on routine training manoeuvres, and Admiral James T. Kirk seems resigned to the fact that this inspection may well be the last space mission of his career. But Khan is back. Aided by his exiled band of genetic supermen, Khan (Ricardo Montalban) - brilliant renegade of 20th century Earth - has raided Space Station Regula One, stolen a top secret device called Project Genesis, wrestled control of another Federation star ship, and now schemes to set a most deadly trap for his old enemy Kirk... with the threat of a universal Armageddon!

#### **Star Trek III - The Search For Spock**

A dying planet. A fight for life. Admiral Kirk's defeat of Khan and the creation of the Genesis planet are empty victories. Spock is dead and McCoy is inexplicably being driven insane. Then a surprise visit from Sarek, Spock's father provides a startling revelation: McCoy is harbouring Spock's living essence. With one friend alive and one not, but both in pain.

Kirk attempts to help his friend by stealing the USS Enterprise and defying Starfleet's Genesis



planet quarantine. But the Klingons have also learned of Genesis and race to meet Kirk in a deadly rendezvous.

#### **Star Trek IV - The Voyage Home**

They travelled back to where 23rd century man had never gone before. To a mad, crazy, outrageous time. 1986. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and the rest of the U.S.S. Enterprise crew take to the skies in one of the most acclaimed and intriguing Star Trek adventures ever. It's the 23rd Century, and a mysterious alien power is threatening Earth by evaporating the oceans and destroying the atmosphere. In a frantic attempt to save mankind, Kirk and his crew must travel back to 1986 San Francisco where they find a world of punk, pizza and exact-change buses that are as alien as anything they've ever encountered in the far reaches of the galaxy.

A thrilling, action-packed mission for the Starship Enterprise!

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### **Synergy Magazine**

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#### **Editors**

Robert Black & Bob Estreich

#### **Proof Reader**

Fiona Jones



## GIVEAWAYS

### Star Trek V - The Final Frontier:

The thrilling adventures of the crew of the Starship Enterprise continue as a renegade Vulcan hijacks the massive ship, sending Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and the crew on a journey to uncover the innermost secrets of the universe.

### Star Trek VI - The Undiscovered Country

The Enterprise crew must fight to salvage a peace treaty between the Federation and the Klingons when it is sabotaged by a rogue member of the hostile alien race. Kirk, Spock and the rest of the crew must somehow save the fragile possibility of peace before countless lives are lost.

### Star Trek - Generations

In the late twenty-third century, the gala maiden voyage of the third Starship Enterprise (NCC-1701-B) boasts such luminaries as Pavel Chekov, Montgomery Scott, and the legendary Captain James T. Kirk as guests. But the maiden voyage turns to disaster as the unprepared ship is forced to rescue two transport ships from a mysterious energy ribbon. The Enterprise manages to save a handful of the ships' passengers and barely makes it out intact...but at the cost of Captain Kirk's life.

Seventy-eight years later, Captain Jean-Luc Picard and the crew of the Enterprise-D find themselves at odds with the renegade scientist Soren...who is destroying entire star systems. Only one man can help Picard stop Soren's scheme...and he's been dead for seventy-eight years...

### Star Trek - First Contact

Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) and the Next Generation crew engage in their most thrilling adventure yet - a sci-fi action event that "stands proud and apart" (Richard Collins, Time) They call themselves the Borg, a half-organic, half-machine collective with a sole purpose: to conquer and assimilate all races. Led by their seductive and sadistic queen, the Borg are headed to Earth with a devious plan to alter history. Picard's last encounter with the Borg almost killed him. Now he wants vengeance. But how far will he go?

### Star Trek - Insurrection

From the beginning of the Federation, the Prime



Directive was clear: no Starfleet expedition may interfere with the natural development of other civilizations. But now Picard is confronted with orders that undermine that decree. If he obeys, 600 peaceful residents of Ba'ku will be forcibly removed from their world. All for the reportedly greater good of millions who will benefit from Ba'ku's Fountain of Youth-like powers. If he disobeys, he will risk his Starship, his career, his life. But for Picard, there's really only one choice. He must rebel against Starfleet...and lead the insurrection to preserve Paradise.

### Star Trek - Nemesis

Captain Jean-Luc Picard and the Enterprise are on a diplomatic mission to initiate peace with the Romulans. Learning that the Romulans have undergone a political upheaval and their new Praetor, Shinzon, wants to discuss a peace treaty with the Federation, Picard and his crew must investigate the situation and determine Shinzon's sincerity.

But they learn that not only is the new Praetor not a Romulan at all but a native of Romulus' sister planet Remus, they also find that he is a human replica of Picard, bio-engineered by the Romulans to be substituted for the captain as a weapon against the Federation. Now, Picard and his crew must determine if the Romulans truly desire a peace treaty, or if they have other plans in mind.

The 10 films comes with 2 extras DVDs and room for the new release Star Trek film. Paramount has supplied us with some giveaway sets with copies of the latest Star Trek film to complete the series !

Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with *Star Trek* in the subject line for a chance to win !





### Roadshow Tarantino Giveaway

The Quentin Tarantino Ultimate Collection from Roadshow includes *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *True Romance* and *Kill Bill Volumes 1 and 2*.

If you have not experienced Tarantino before this is a great way to start, if you love his style this is a great way to have a nice collection in one set.

Roadshow has given us three sets to giveaway.

Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with *Tarantino* in the subject line for a chance to win !

The giveaway starts when the magazine hits the website (late January) and finishes Feb 25th. Winners will be notified by email.

No correspondence will be entered into, prizes will be sent via registered post.

Australian entries only please

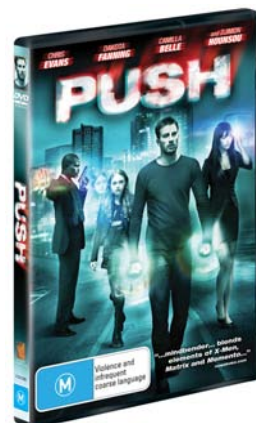
### Summer Night In' Giveaway

Thanks to Icon Films the Summer Night In' DVD pack is guaranteed to give you the films you need for a great night in to combat the heat.

Snuggle up with seductive Sasha Grey in the role that sees her break topical ground in *The Girlfriend Experience* from acclaimed director Steven Soderbergh.

John Woo's visionary tale of a battle that shattered an empire and shaped a nation in the epic *Battle of Red Cliff*.

Join the fight against a U.S. government agency set on eliminating a group of young ex-pats with special abilities, hiding amongst the gritty



streets of Hong Kong in *Push* starring the smart mouthed & witty Chris Evans and Brazilian beauty Camilla Belle.

Finally, follow Dennis Quaid as he hunts down a violently charged serial killer in *The Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

These packs include one of each DVD.

*The Girlfriend Experience*

*The Battle of Red Cliff*

*Push*

*Horsemen of the Apocalypse*

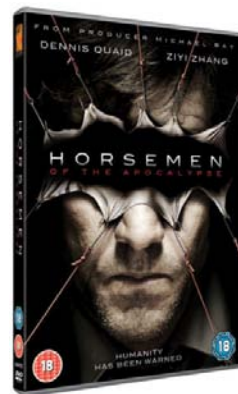
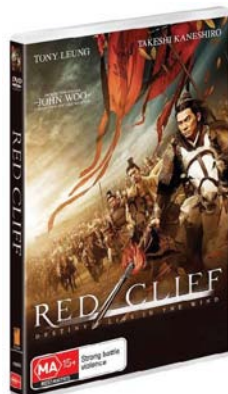
They are a superbly diverse range of entertainment with something for everyone.

Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with *Summer Night In* in the subject line for a chance to win !

The giveaway starts when the magazine hits the website (late January) and finishes Feb 25th. Winners will be notified by email.

No correspondence will be entered into, prizes will be sent via registered post.

Australian entries only please



# The Chucky Collection

## The Complete Horrific Saga

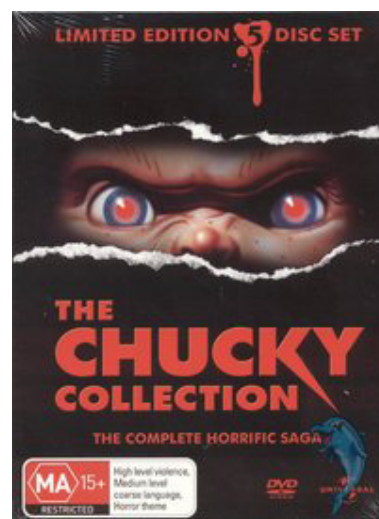
### *Chucky's Back !*

It all began when serial killer Charles LeRay takes refuge in a toy factory after being shot by police.

The voodoo educated serial killer puts his voodoo to use and transfers his soul into a "Good Guy" doll which is the current Toy craze at the time. Once possessed 'Chucky' winds up in the hands of young Andy Barclay the terror begins as Chucky desperately tries to transfer his soul into Andy's body – and embarks on a murderous rampage to stop anyone who gets in his way.

In the fourth instalment of the saga Chucky is reunited with his former lover Tiffany who joins his quest to help him be resurrected as a human but ultimately becomes the 'Bride of Chucky' for her efforts. The demented family gets a little stranger with the 'Seed of Chucky' as Chucky and Tiffany's spawn; Glen is reunited with them while a Hollywood film based on Chucky's exploits is underway. Unfortunately – in true Chucky fashion, this family reunion ends in tears – and bloodshed! Playtime's over..... Permanently!

This is *The Complete Horrific Saga Limited Edition* in a 5 DVD set which contains:



**Child's Play**  
**Child's Play 2**  
**Child's Play 3**  
**Bride Of Chucky**  
**Seed Of Chucky**

Special Features include

*Child's Play*: Original theatrical trailer  
*Bride of Chucky*: Original theatrical trailer  
 Behind The Scenes & Interview Sound bites  
*Seed of Chucky*: Family Hell-iday slideshow  
 Audio Commentary with Director Don Mancini & Jennifer Tilly  
 Conceiving the 'Seed of Chucky'  
 Tilly on the Tonight Show & Telemundo Interview

Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with *Chucky In* in the subject line for a chance to win !

The giveaway starts when the magazine hits the website and finishes February 22rd.

Winners will be notified by email. No correspondence will be entered into, prizes will be sent via registered post.

Australian entries only please



### The Fields

The principal photography has now wrapped on *The Fields*, the second film from the team that brought you that strange and wonderful film *The Fourth Dimension*.



Production spanned six weeks, throughout September and October, and was shot 100% on location in the Pocono Mountains region in Pennsylvania.

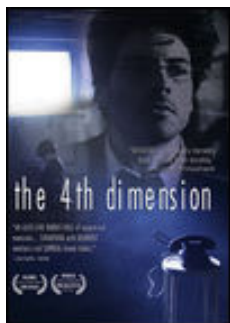
*The Fields* is a psychological thriller based on actual events that took place in a small Pennsylvania town in 1973. The film, written by Harrison Smith, tells the story of a young boy and his family who are terrorized by a menacing presence lurking in the cornfields surrounding their farmhouse.

The film stars Tara Reid, Academy Award Winner Cloris Leachman, Joshua Ormond, Bev Appleton, and Faust Checho.

You can learn more about *The Fields* at [www.thefieldsmovie.com](http://www.thefieldsmovie.com) and become a fan on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/thefieldsmovie>.

Be sure to read Dread Central's exclusive set visit report at [www.dreadcentral.com/news/34340/exclusive-the-fields-set-visit-report](http://www.dreadcentral.com/news/34340/exclusive-the-fields-set-visit-report).

In addition to wrapping *The Fields*, *The 4th Dimension*, is now available on Sony's PlayStation Network. Producer Daniel M. Kalai secured the film's first VOD distribution deal with Sony, making *The 4th Dimension* the only independent feature film offered in their catalogue.



**First look at Parabella Nigel: Saiko Saikik Witch Bitch** Polly Staffle films hopes to fund film online

The clip, which is just a little over a minute, was made from public domain footage to give fans and investors an idea of the film's mood.

The project is being described by writer and director Chad Clinton Freeman as a slasher noir about a psychic that may or may not be a serial killer.

"It's going to be a mind trip of a film that is sort of like 'Saw' meets 'The Sixth Sense' on crack," said Freeman, a producer on *"Amateur Porn Star Killer 3D"* and *"Killer Biker Chicks"*.

"This is a dark and ugly story that I hope to turn into a beautiful film that is part art-house and part grindhouse. I hope to make a project that is creative, full of energy and has something to say."

Freeman is currently trying to fund the film's \$16,666 budget online via [Kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com). This is the film's first phase. No cast or crew attachments will be made until funding is in place.

"*'Paranormal Activity'* was made for less than \$20k and it killed at the box office," Freeman said. "That film reminded me of how important guerrilla marketing is in this business."

So I thought if social sites can help build that much buzz for a movie once its made, then perhaps it's possible to get people interested in a project based on its pitch and have them rally around to help fund it."

"*Parabella Nigel: Saiko Saikik Witch Bitch*" will be the feature length debut from Freeman's Polly Staffle Films. The production company's first short film "*Super Undead Doctor Roach*" was a 48 Hour Film Project that later became a 2009 Arizona Underground Film Festival selection.

Freeman is a Las Vegas based mass media specialist and is best known for his entertainment website [PollyStaffle.com](http://www.PollyStaffle.com), which has been on hiatus this past year.

He has also been a part of the independent films "*Silent Night*," "*Zombie Night*," "*One Long Day*," "*Breath of Hate*" and others.

**Parabella Nigel: Saiko Saikik Witch Bitch**  
Video Clip

Web: <http://www.vimeo.com/7875326>

**To help kick-start Parabella:**

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/pollystaffle/parabella-nigel-saiko-saikik-witch-bitch-a-slash-0>



### Snug-guns—New Model

**Web:** <http://www.snug-guns.com>

Snug-gunS has a new model! We're excited to announce the long-awaited arrival of the Ray Gun! In addition to our Auto-Pistol, Grenade and Anti-Personnel Mine Pillow. We now have something to help you take out those pesky aliens.

Each design is silk-screened onto soft mil-spec cotton/poly jersey or interlock, depending on the model, with striking graphics and stuffed with weapons-grade polyester fiberfill for enhanced durability in battlefield conditions...or even in your own home!

### Electric Sheep Moves Online

**Web:** <http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/>

*Electric Sheep fought the law, and the law won. We thank Wallflower Press for making our print adventure possible and for their enthusiasm and support, but economic laws have triumphed and it's the end of the road for the magazine.*

The Electric Sheep battle against conformity continues on the internet, the modern refuge for the truly independent spirit. Stay tuned for more weird, wild and wonderful film discussions every month.

Due to the recession Wallflower books have decided to no longer publisher *Electric Sheep: The Magazine of Deviant Cinema*. The magazine established itself as a monthly online review of genre cinema with quarterly print editions. It will continue as a dynamic online presence.

### Severin Films opens all new website !

*80+ Page On-Line Destination Includes Trailers, Film Clips, Blogs, Facebook/Twitter Connect and Exclusive Content For Fans & Media*



The state-of-the-art site will include individual pages for the company's 60+ DVD and Blu-ray releases, with each page featuring stills, trailers, film clips, press links and Bonus Feature excerpts. In addition, the site will feature up-to-date news, a full company bio, mailing list, retail links, exclusive offers, connections to Severin's popular Facebook and Twitter pages, and the option to sign up for a regular newsletter.

The company also plans to host noted guest bloggers for weekly on-line discussions. Media outlets will be able to obtain press releases, Quicktime film clips, and high-resolution colour stills and box art from a password-protected area. The site's construction was supervised by Severin's Evan Husney and designed by Nada Advertising of Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota and Laguna Beach, California.

"Severin finally has a website worthy of its films," said Carl Daft, co-founder and CEO of Severin Films. "As our company has grown, the equally burgeoning fan and media support our releases have received has demanded we create an online destination as unique and provocative as the company itself. Welcome to Severin 2.0."

Severin Films was formed in 2006 with offices in Los Angeles, New York and London. Their previous DVD releases include Richard Stanley's cult smash *Hardware*, recent Goya Award winner Jess Franco's *Macumba Sexual* and *Bloody Moon*, Walerian Borowczyk's *Immoral Women*, the unrated Director's Cut of *Gwendoline* starring Tawny Kitaen, Oscar® nominee Patrice Leconte's international hit *The Hairdressers Husband*, and Enzo Castellari's original action classic *The Inglorious Bastards*.

**Web:** <http://www.severin-films.com>





# THE ROBOTS OF ISAAC ASIMOV



Asimov's writing career began in 1939 with *Marooned Off Vesta*, an utterly forgettable short story published in *Amazing Stories*

In 1940 a short story called *Strange Playfellow* was released in *Super Science Stories*, another early SF pulp magazine. It was Asimov's first robot story and over the

next few decades he virtually set the design of robots in concrete. His story featured a primitive robot called Robbie that was built as a minder for small children for parents who didn't have the time for parenting.

*"He was not no machine!  
He was a person just like you and me and he  
was my friend".*

Prophetically it also discussed the population's revolt against machines that could take their jobs away, the potential dangers of an uncontrolled machine, and the industrial uses of an intelligent robot.

The robot's abilities centred around the "positronic brain", a platinum – iridium sponge that mimicked the pathways of a human brain in about the same space. The brain was pre-programmed with what became the most important concept of robot stories – the Three Laws of Robotics.

A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

A robot must obey the orders given it by a human being except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

*A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.*

Although they are just literary devices these laws are so simple, so appropriate, that they have been used by many writers since then. It was also pointed out in a later story that although these Laws were characteristic of robots, they could just as easily be the operating principles of a good, caring human being. While at the present levels of technology it would be impossible to program these laws into any computer known (define in machine terms "come to harm") they were a good starting point for discussing ethics in machines and humans. This approach was the basis for many of Asimov's novels.

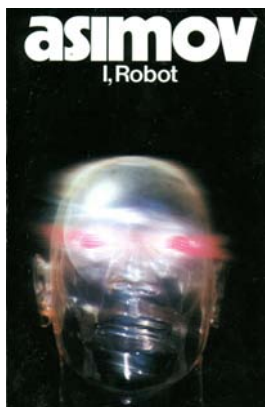
Asimov went on to write many more short stories about robots, all revolving around the Three Laws and their problems with interpretation as robots developed higher states of awareness. A robot that feels that it serves a God rather than mankind? A robot that can tell lies?

These were combined into a book, *I Robot*. They were tied together by the thread of Doctor Susan Calvin, the first "robopsychologist".

---

Bob Estreich

Doctor Calvin's investigations of the robots' interactions with the Three Laws explored the conflicts in the human brain as well, and Asimov managed to show that in their own way the robots were perhaps simpler, more honest than humans and perhaps capable of more compassion. His view of a robot was as a friend to mankind as they went out to explore the galaxy together.

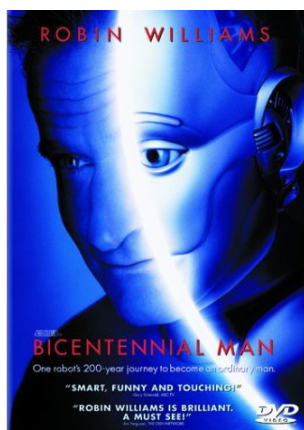


*To you, a robot is just a robot. But you haven't worked with them. You don't know them. They're a cleaner, better breed than we are*

The stories gradually became mainstream novels and some robots became recurring characters like R Daneel Olivaw, a robot indistinguishable from a human. He first appeared in the novels *The Naked Sun* and *Caves of Steel*. These postulated a humanity grown so thick on Earth that mankind has retreated underground, leaving the entire surface for farming. The social problems are immense, including cannibalism. The people are now generally afflicted with agoraphobia which keeps them in their caves under the Earth.

Other planets have been settled by Earthmen who now call themselves "Spacers" but they will not take the Earth's excess population. The relatively underpopulated planets are run on a robot economy and the Spacers do not wish hordes of disease-ridden Earth people on the loose throughout the galaxy. Man's uncontrolled breeding is Earth's weakness. The paranoia about disease is the Spacers' weakness. They have resorted to war to protect themselves and confine humanity to Earth. The robots are the only beings who can exist relatively easily on both sides.

Perhaps Asimov's most poignant novel was *Bicentennial Man*, an allegory on slavery that featured a robot who simply wants to be truly human and fights for the right to do so. This was made into a film starring Robin Williams, an actor I did not have a high opinion of. He



did a perfect job of playing the robot with respect and compassion and turned Asimov's short story into something truly great. The story and film explore what it is to be legally human. The story was awarded the Hugo Award for best science fiction novelette of 1976

Not all filmmakers had the same ability. A film called *I, Robot* and supposedly based on Asimov's stories was a complete reversal of the role Asimov set up for his robots. It had a killer robot that could break the First Law, that was hostile to man, and was about as far from the Three Laws as possible. Although the film's makers paid some lip service by using Asimov's characters they simply went back to the old "robots are the enemies of humanity" storyline and used Asimov's name to try to give some dignity to a disaster. Will Smith should have known better.

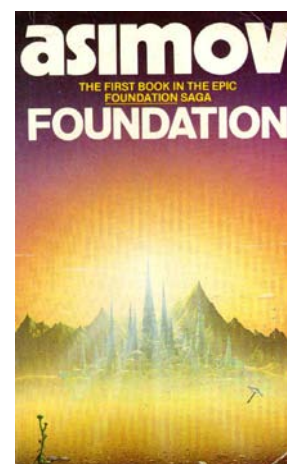


While writing his robot stories Asimov also wrote a parallel series, *The Foundation books*. These postulated a humanity so spread throughout the galaxy that civilisation begins to break down. Because of the huge distances involved a central bureaucracy can no longer control the Empire and it begins to break up.

The Foundation's study of history and the new science of psychohistory leads it to predict a dark age of loss of information, suffering and poverty. Psychohistory is a group of mathematical formulae that can predict the behaviour and likely future history of large enough groups of people.

The Foundation's job is to minimise the dark age by storing all the knowledge of humanity and to reintroduce it as needed.

It was perhaps inevitable that Asimov would combine these two great storylines, robots and Foundation, into one, and he succeeded in 1985 with *Robots*





and *Empire*.

In the end, only the robots are left. And finally, only one robot.

And it came to pass that AC learned how to reverse the direction of entropy. But there was now no man to whom AC might give the answer of the last question. No matter. The answer--by demonstration--would take care of that, too.

For another timeless interval, AC thought how best to do this. Carefully, AC organized the program. The consciousness of AC encompassed all of what had been a Universe and brooded over what was now Chaos.

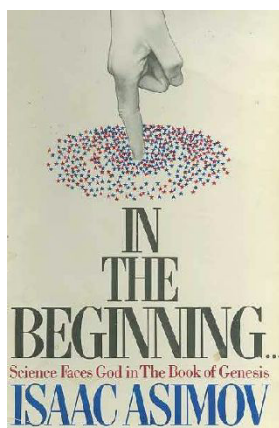
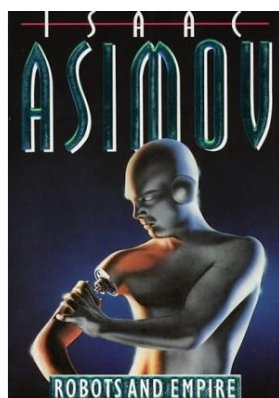
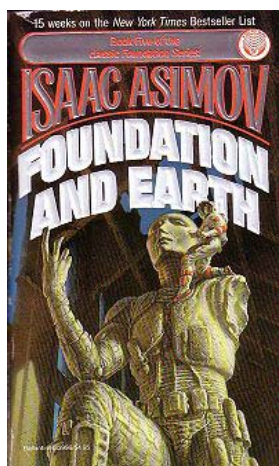
Step by step, it must be done. And AC said, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" And there was light

Asimov wrote many other works during his life including *In The Beginning*, a forensic literary examination of the first books of the Bible regarding evolution versus creationism.

He was a passionate evolutionist and just as strongly anti-creationist.

He had many public arguments with creationists and seems to have taken a sly delight in lampooning them.

Anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'



He also wrote a more statistically oriented work on the existence of life on other planets called *Extraterrestrial Civilizations*.

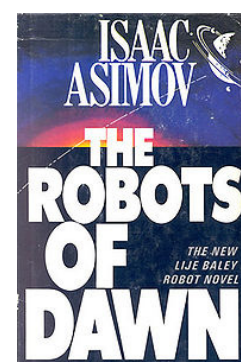
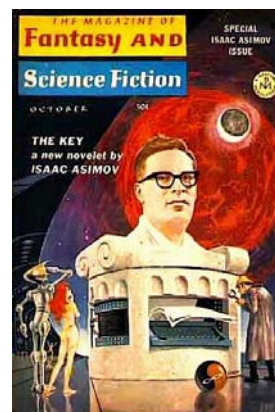
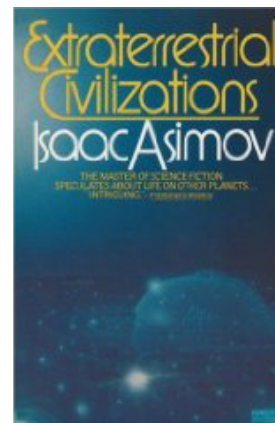
He was eminently suited to write this style of work as he held a PhD in Biochemistry and was an Associate Professor of Biology at the Boston University School of Medicine. Here he researched nucleic acid. He could have had a long and scholarly career writing academic tomes all his life. It's just that the robots kept getting in the way, so he eventually left the University to concentrate on his writing.

If my doctor told me I had only six minutes to live, I wouldn't brood. I'd type a little faster.

Isaac Asimov, Doctor of Biochemistry, and the worlds' most prolific author of science fiction and popular science, died on April 6 1992 at the age of 72.

This is only a brief listing of some of the more important works. Many have been published in Anthologies such as the *Complete Robot*.

I. Robot 1950  
(as a collection of short stories)  
Foundation 1951  
The Stars Like Dust 1951  
The Currents of Space 1952  
Pebble In The Sky 1950  
Foundation and Empire 1952  
Second Foundation 1953  
The Naked Sun 1957  
The Bicentennial Man 1976  
Foundation's Edge 1983  
Foundation and Earth 1986  
The Robots of Dawn 1984





*No one would have believed in the early years of the 21st century that our world was being watched by intelligences greater than our own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns, they observed and studied, the way a man with a microscope might scrutinize the creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency, men went to and fro about the globe, confident of our empire over this world. Yet across the gulf of space, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic regarded our planet with envious eyes and slowly, and surely, drew their plans against us.*

#### **War of the Worlds, 2005**

H. G. Wells (1866-1946) was an author, futurist, historian, political thinker and socialist. He was born on September 21st, 1866 in Bromley, England to a family of shopkeepers. His education was patchy and since his family were not especially well off he was forced into an early apprenticeship as a Draper, something he later wrote about in very negative terms. He was a voracious reader and devoured everything he could get his hands on. Fortune shined on him and he secured a position at Midhurst Grammar School which meant that he could continue his education.

When the school closed he continued in a number of apprenticeships and worked as a journalist. In 1883 he won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in London and was able to undertake studies in biology and Darwinism under Thomas Henry Huxley and this is clearly illustrated in the advanced scientific knowledge on show in many of his works, including *The War of the Worlds*.



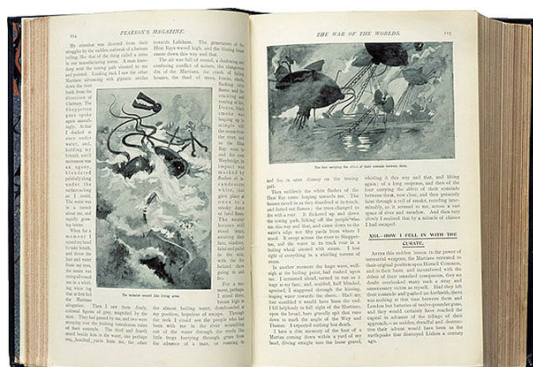
With Jules Verne (1828-1905) Wells is considered one of the fathers of science fiction. Verne and Wells were in constant competition; Verne took a "hard science fiction" approach to writing fiction while Wells was more interested in the social consequences of the concepts under discussion.

Wells had an encyclopaedic knowledge of science and kept himself informed of all the latest developments. He would then speculate about how these may evolve and produce stories which reflected these speculations. At the same time he always worked to explore the social and political consequences of science and technology. From this foundation he produced both fiction and non-fiction works.

Wells generally had a pessimistic view of humanity and in many of his works foreshadowed such developments as laser beams, global wars, robots, aerial bombings, tanks, chemical and germ warfare and nuclear weapons. One of his more interesting ideas was about the "World Brain" which would hold the sum of all human knowledge and make it available on demand; a vision of the World Wide Web way before its time.

Indeed he was so prophetic that many balmy new agers try to claim him as one of their own and see him as a psychic masquerading as a scientist. While his later works became stridently humanistic and socialist in tone, all of his works are imbued with a rationalist worldview.





*The War of The Worlds* was first unveiled in 1897 in *Pearson's Magazine* as a serialisation.

His first major published work was *Select Conversations With an Uncle* (1895). However, it was *The Time Machine*, published in 1895 which proved his first success. This was followed by *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), and *War of the Worlds* (1898). He called his "science fiction" novels "scientific romances" but he also produced what could be best described as futurist fiction.

His futurist fiction fluctuated between a utopian and dystopian perspective; he seemed unsure about man's potential to use science for good and wondered about mankind's ability to survive. *A Modern Utopia* (1905) has a very positive view of the future while *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) has a more measured tone. It was adapted to film in 1936, a lovely restored edition is available from Legend Films (R1).

His most dystopian novel was *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, rewritten as *The Sleeper Awakes* (1910), it focuses on the conflict between the classes which he saw inevitably leading to revolution. *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), while primarily exploring nature versus nature and the limits of science, also discusses the way in which man, without rationality, ends up being nothing more than a beast.



*The Time Machine* 1895  
1st Edition



Wells' first nonfiction bestseller was *Anticipations* (1901). It was originally serialised as *An Experiment in Prophecy*. It was a speculative work examining what the world would be like in the year 2000. In it Wells explored everything from the defeat of German militarism to the development of greater sexual and emotional freedom for men and woman. He considered the movement of populations away from the cities into the suburbs and even postulated a form of the European Union.

Wells also continued to write nonfiction including his *The Outline of History* (1920), *A Short History of the World*, (1922), *The Science of Life* (1930) and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1931).

Wells considered himself an evolutionary socialist and was a member of the Fabian society. While he left the society in 1906 after some disagreements with members (he was always an intellectual maverick), he continued to hold progressive left leaning views. His scientific worldview coupled with his progressive political views formed the philosophical foundations of all of his works.

He was politically active in many fields including women's rights and was a strong believer in international cooperation. He championed the concept of the League of Nations (predecessor to the United Nations) and was involved in the worldwide promotion of free speech. He had an ambiguous relationship to religion, he publically rejected Christianity and defined himself as a scientific pantheist.

He died on August 13th, 1946 from cancer at the age of seventy nine.

### The War of the Worlds (1898)

H.G Wells wrote *The War of the Worlds* in 1898. It is a work filled with fascinating themes and motifs including the clash of religion and science, reflections on technology and industrialization, the dangers of war and the inherent powerlessness of man in comparison to nature herself. The Red Weed is also used by Wells to offer an very earlier environmental warning.

One of the more significant underlying themes is that of nature is the ultimate "point of reference". Everything fails to stop the alien menace (even prayer) but man's unique place within the "web of life" protects him.

While mankind has evolved immunity from bacteria over millions of year, it destroys the intruders who attempt to invade the earth.

A synopsis will prove of use as it gives a background to the way in which the story has been adapted in radio, music and film.

Mars is a planet much older than earth and its inhabitants have devised a means of space travel. Other planets in the system are not suitable for life and so they decide to invade Earth and set themselves on the long journey in strange shaped canisters.

Ogilvy is a well respected astronomer and sees these canisters through his telescope. As they are reported in the press everyone comes to know about the canisters leaving Mars but have no idea about their nature or significance. Ogilvy sees a meteorite falling from the sky and decides to investigate. What he finds intrigues him, there seems to be something or someone inside of it. He grabs journalist Henderson and a crowd develops around the meteorite.

Soon it becomes obvious it is some sort of craft and the top unscrews and strange, unearthly creatures emerge. They are slightly larger than humans, have many tentacles, but do not have distinct bodies. Their heads have very large eyes. The crowd cowers in horror at the sight of these monstrosities, but slowly, with the added protection of the local authorities, they move closer. As the craft rises it sprays out a laser heat beam incinerating some forty people.

The Martians begin to work at the pit, but nobody really knows what they are doing as anyone who comes too close is incinerated. Slowly the danger of the situation becomes all too obvious and the military are called. During the following night a second craft lands.

Since the story is told through the eyes of a narrator we begin to see his personal view of the events. The military has taken control of the region and is asking people to evacuate, so he evacuates his wife to Leatherhead where she has cousins. He returns to find out what is happening and is caught in a storm. As his cart overturns and the horse bolts, he lands on the ground and looking up towards the sky sees a glowing metal tripod, he can see a Martian inside controlling it. The narrator tries to learn more about the situation and hears a tale from an artilleryman about how the Martians are decimating the countryside with their laser heat ray.



As the narrator travels with the artilleryman he arrives at Weybridge at the same time the Martians begin destroying everything in sight. He only just makes it to an abandoned boat and floats downstream. He drags himself out onto the bank and passes out from exhaustion. He awakens to company; the curate of the Weybridge church. The curate seems unable to cope with the disaster and simply follows the narrator about.

The book now moves its focus to London where we hear the tale of the narrator's brother. The news of the attacks have only just starting to trickle into London but as more refugees arrive with tales of towns laying in ruins panic begins to set in. On the Monday morning police go door to door issuing warnings about the impending disaster. The people of London are told that the Martians seem unstoppable and are on their way. The narrator's brother joins the exodus.

At this stage there is still a concerted resistance to the aliens. However, soon the Martians start using a new weapon, the Black Smoke. The gas is deadly and the Martians spread it by firing a jet of steam into it. There is widespread panic and people flee en masse in terror, crowds start rioting and the exodus is marred by violence and fighting. The brother accompanied by Miss. Elphinstone are lucky enough to get passage on the paddle steamer Olstend. As the steamer leaves they can see part of the clash between the warship Thunder Child and the Martians.





As the story returns to the narrator a fifth cylinder has landed right beside the narrator and curate trapping them in a house. The curate has become unstable and starts loudly confessing his sins. Even though the narrator knocks him out it is too late and the Martians capture the curate. The narrator is reduced to hiding in the coal cellar.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> day the narrator notes that the Martians have abandoned the pit. The landscape has radically changed being overtaken with a red weed which has originated on Mars. After various events the narrator arrives in London. Everywhere he looks there are bodies covered in black dust. Strangely it is deadly quiet, he hears the sound of a Martian in the distance, but then it slowly stops.

The narrator believes life on earth is doomed and decides to commit suicide, running towards where he believes the Martians will be. However, when he reaches Primrose Hill and looks down on the Martian base, he sees them all dead. It seems they have succumbed to an enemy they did not even consider; bacteria to which men have become immune over millions of years of evolution.

Soon the world is celebrating the death of the Martians and the narrator has heard that the town of Leatherhead has been destroyed, however when he returns he finds his wife still alive. Things may return to normal but the world will always remember the lives lost and the fears evoked by the attack of the Martians.

## The War of The Worlds Radio Play

*The War of the Worlds Radio Play* (1938) was an episode of the American radio drama series *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. It was performed as the Halloween episode on October 30th, 1938. It was directed and narrated by Orson Welles, who offered a modern adaptation of the novel.



The show was presented in a format never tried before. The first two thirds of the 60-minute broadcast was broadcast as a series of news bulletins which simulated what it would be like if an actual Martian invasion was in progress.

The program opens with describing the intentions of the aliens and places the adaptation in 1938. Then the show continues with a weather report and an ordinary dance segment featuring "Ramon Raquello and His Orchestra". These are interrupted by news flashes about strange explosions on Mars. Welles makes his first appearance as a famous astronomer and Professor Richard Pierson, who refutes speculation about life on Mars. The effect was to create a show with exceptional dramatic impact, as the program continued and the intensity of the bulletins increased, many were convinced it was real and panic ensued.

While Welles added a disclaimer at the end of the show clearing stating it was a work of fiction, the effect was electric. Since the show was run without commercial breaks many fled to the hills before hearing the disclaimer at the end.

While this episode certainly launched Orson Welles career, at the time it was publically denounced with complaints against the broadcasters. Since this was a period building towards World War II and the fear of Hitler was palpable, the show tapped into a growing hysteria



about invasion and submission to a cold, alien (read foreign) power. Since many listeners did not have telephones, as neighbour discussed the show with neighbour rumours quickly spread and the show ended up having far more impact than ever expected. The worst effected location was Concrete, Washington. At the point when the Martian were supposedly invading the countryside, a power failure plunged the entire town into darkness. Without electricity or phone, the town truly thought it was the War of the Worlds.

### War of the Worlds (1952)

*And before we judge them [the Martians] too harshly, we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals, such as the vanished Bison and the Dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?*

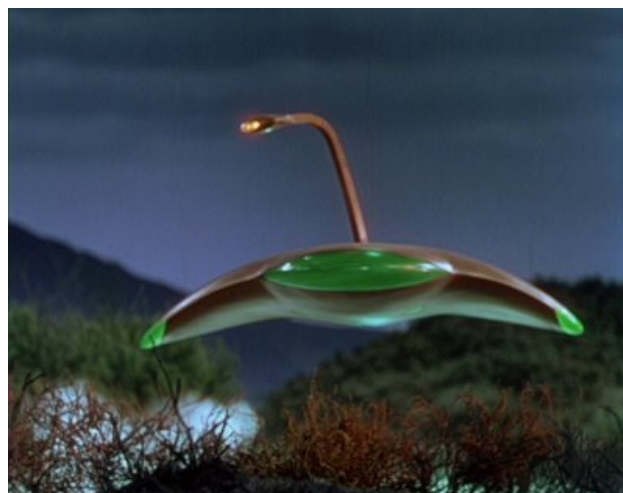
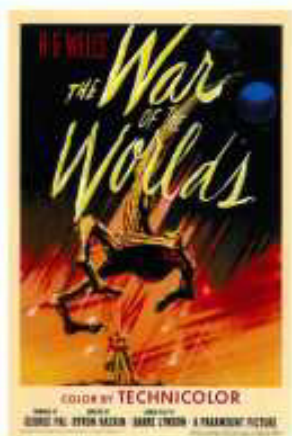
#### The War of the Worlds

##### Chapter I, The Eve of the War

The 1952 film adaptation of *War of the Worlds* by George Pal for Paramount Pictures won an Oscar for Best Special Effects and brought the tale into the modern era.

The screenplay by Barré Lyndon was an excellent example of how a book cannot not be literally translated to screen but requires a deep appreciation of the themes and motifs that lie behind it. Lyndon clearly had a good understanding of the spirit of the book and made changes which actually assisted the film communicate the primary themes in the best possible way. By making the central character a scientist rather than a journalist as in the book, the film was able to keep the focus on science and technology rather on family or personal issues. At the same time by using unknown actors the emphasis was on the Martians rather on the human characters.

One change which was very much of the period was with the curate. In the book Wells used the curate to offer a fairly sus-



tained critique of Christianity climaxing in the curate putting others at risk when he hysterically confesses his sins. To survive the narrator needs to bash the curate on the head but not before the Martians hear the noise and come and retrieve the curate's body, the narrator hiding in a coal cellar.

Obviously such a sustained attack on Christianity and the killing of a priest would be somewhat unpalatable in 1952 so this was reduced to the priest confronting the Martians waving a Bible in his hand sprouting scripture, a powerful image nevertheless.

At the same time the film used a range of images to emphasize the anti scientific prejudices of the time, something which was very important to Wells. In the latter part of the film it is found that the aliens are anaemic and it may be possible to use germ warfare against them. Sylvia states that it took God six days to create the world and it seems it will take the Martians six days to conquer it. The scientists then suggest that they will work for six days to find a biological agent. Soon after their trucks are attacked and all the equipment destroyed by rampaging





mobs in the frenzy of the exodus from the city. The clear inference being that the “mob” was some sort of retribution for the scientist’s arrogance.

The scientific focus of the film is also found in a discussion of evolution, whereby the scientists postulate how the Martians evolved differently to man due to the unique climate of Mars. This, of course, underpins the conclusion of the film where bacteria, to which man has an immunity, attacks the immune system of the Martians and kills them.

The film itself has a marked ambiguity regarding religion. We have the priest trying to communicate with the Martians and being incinerated and foolish adherents praying in Churches rather than fleeing.

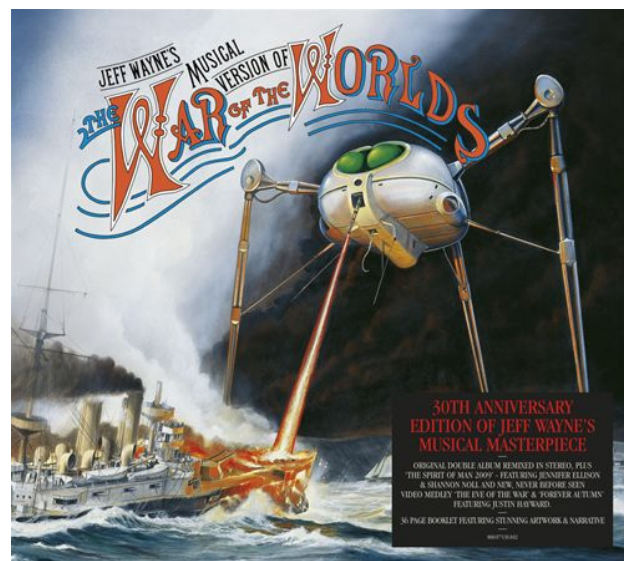
At the end while they may think “God” saves the day through bacteria (including the narrator), ultimately it is the natural order which solves the problem. This is very much in keeping with Wells’ own beliefs, he publically disavowed Christianity and was an evolutionary pantheist. While the end of the film may have a “religious” gloss, it is actually undermined by the core message of the film.

The imagery of the film is of course loaded with motifs of the World Wars, the Cold War and the fear of invasion. It also hints at discomfort with military technology (the Martians have advanced crafts but they are cold and without soul). There is also some doubt about the efficiency of nuclear weapons; even when the nuclear bomb is dropped on the Martians they keep coming. Clearly this is a subtle reference to public discomfort about Hiroshima and the ethics of using such a weapon and whether, ultimately, it actually has the power to end a war.

The special effects used at the time were cutting edge and the colour, sets and mood of the film still make it a memorable cinematic experience. The special edition DVD from Paramount (R4) is especially impressive including a beautifully restored edition of the film with such extras as a biography of H.G. Wells, a making of feature and the original radio plays.

### War of the Worlds: The Musical (1978)

In 1978 Jeff Wayne produced a musical version of *The War of the Worlds* as a “progressive rock” concept album. Most of the lyrics on the album were written by former Elton John lyricist Gary Osborne with Jeff Wayne and others retell-



ing the story. It starred Richard Burton as the narrator-protagonist, Justin Hayward (of The Moody Blues), Phil Lynott (The Parson), Julie Covington, David Essex and Chris Thompson.

It was an instant success. “Forever Autumn” sung by Justin Hayward was a UK Top 5 single, while the album itself spent 290 weeks in the UK charts. It was in the top 10 in 22 countries and reached the number one spot in 11 countries. The original 1978 double vinyl LP’s had a startling gatefold with superb artwork and were issued with an accompanying 16 page (10” x 10”) booklet containing artwork, script and lyrics. It was released on double CD in 1985. A Sinclair Spectrum computer game was issued in 1984, a PC CD Rom game in 1998 followed by a PlayStation Game in 1999. The DVD of the live show was released in 2006.

In 2006 after years of patient planning Jeff Wayne’s *The War of The Worlds* was brought to the stage for the first time, playing to sold-out arenas around the world. The musical brings together offers a spectacular mix of live music, theatre, multi-media and visual arts on a grand scale.



It combines the brilliance of the original performers including Jeff Wayne, Justin Hayward, Chris Thompson and even the late Richard Burton along with a brand new cast, the 10-piece Black Smoke Band, the 48-piece ULLAdubULLA Strings and an unforgettable fully operating 30ft Martian Fighting Machine! A CD and DVD of the show is currently available.

### Modern Versions

Various modern adaptations have been made of The War of The Worlds including the TV Series *The War of The Worlds* (Late Eighties), *War of the Worlds* (2005) directed by David Michael Latt and *War of the Worlds 2: The Next Wave* (2008) directed by C. Thomas Howell, both from The Asylum Films. The most significant was the 2005 release starring Tom Cruise.

The Hollywood blockbuster version of *War of the Worlds* seems to have a lot going for it. It is much closer in plot to a literal reading of the original novel and, of course, is laden with amazing CGI effects. Directed by Steven Spielberg, it won numerous cinema awards and was nominated for various Oscars. On the plus side it offers an incredible evocation of the horrifying futility of war and it's terrible after effects. While this was only hinted at in the 1952 film, here it is all too clear. Images of the front line have clear resonances with World War II and the Holocaust and do bring the anti war message of the original up to date.



At the same time I have some misgivings, George Pal realized the significance of the scientific underpinnings to the film and used a scientist as the central character, he also used unknowns to keep the focus on the Martians. Here you have Tom Cruise as the father of a dysfunctional family with a terribly annoying whining female child and a rebellious male teen. It is so stereotyped that it is irritating and places a soap opera in the middle of the film. Since this is a Hollywood Blockbuster the emphasis is on



action, action and more action and so the nuances of the original tale are, at times, overlooked. The sheer visceral presentation of the war imagery, while significant, overrides all of the other themes.

The curate, for example, has been all but removed. Spielberg has clearly made a commercial decision in light of the U.S market's distaste for criticism of religion. The curate's role has been excised and replaced with a survivalist. To be fair the survivalist played by Tim Robbins is creepy in the extreme and when he must be killed by Ray Ferrier (Tom Cruise) to protect his daughter, it is a powerful scene. It does illustrate how, in a time of war, terrible decisions must be made just to survive. That being said, it ignores the religious aspects to the curate's role in the original film and hence a major theme in Wells' tale is removed.

Extending from this the scenes of fighting during the exodus from the city are refocused on family survival rather than on the scientists as in the 1952 film. While this may be literally closer to the original novel, in practical terms it again moves the focus of the tale from science to family dynamics. This means that the ending of the film has far less context.







In the 1952 film we have a “framework” for understanding the death of the aliens; we have heard about their separate evolutionary development and have come to appreciate various subtexts about science and rationality.

Accordingly when the Martians die due to their lack of immunity from bacteria we can link the various themes together and come to a deeper understanding of the film.

The original film also shows how all the different technologies thrown at the Martians did not work and only the “web of life” defends mankind, an important sentiment to Wells. In the 2005 film not only does this theme seem less obvious but when the Martian’s ships begin to fail the army joins in with the killing, something which radically changes the climax of the original book and 1952 film. It is as though Spielberg is saying nature can’t kill the Martians without the help of the U.S. Army.

Obviously every adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* will be different and will reflect the directors’ and screenwriters’ understanding of the original work. It should also be said that obviously every filmmaker has the right to adapt a book in the way they see fit.

However, the book does include highly signifi-



cant themes and motifs which are what makes it so unique and explains why it has proved so popular for so long. While these were clearly elucidated in the 1952 film, the 2005 Hollywood blockbuster ends up less nuanced and with a high whizz bang CGI special effects factor.

I must admit the special effects are certainly marvellous and it is an intense experience with the Martian technology brought into the modern age, but sadly along the way a lot has been lost as well.

### Controversies in The War of the Worlds

H.G. Wells was a humanist, evolutionist and critic of Christianity. He strongly believed in the evolutionary model and the process of natural selection. Many would argue that he clearly encoded these beliefs into *The War of the Worlds*. The battle between the Martians and Man is essentially an evolutionary battle for survival of the fittest.

While both Man and the Martians use various forms of technology to battle against each other (in a form of Social Darwinist struggle), it is the connection with the evolutionary process of earth which provides the solution. At the same time Wells offers a warning against overvaluing intelligence against other human qualities.

In the novel the Martians have evolved an over-developed brain which has left them with cumbersome bodies and a lack of physical strength and immunity.

This “evolutionary” worldview also includes a fairly strident critique of Christianity in the form of the Curate who essentially becomes a nutter under pressure.

It could be suggested that the Curate represents superstitious thinking as a whole which must be “killed” if mankind is to survive and evolve as a species.





It is also interesting to note how Wells views the Martians. They are not presented as evil, simply another species competing for the space man now occupies. While man wins the battle through his unique place in the earth's "web of life" this does not invalidate the alien's evolutionary attempt at survival. This is important because as filmmakers increase the "futility of war" angle to the film with related additional war imagery it adds a further "moral" dimension to the battle between the Martians and Man which Wells probably did not intend.

The science behind the choice of Mars was also interesting. American Astronomer Percival Lowell published the book *Mars* in 1895 which in-



Lovell's map of Mars Canals (1909)

cluded speculations on possible life on Mars. He and others had seen crevices on Mars through telescopes and erroneously interpreted them as canals and signs of some sort of advanced civilization.

Wells took this work and wrote his own essay called *Intelligence on Mars* (1896) in which he wrote a more popular account of the research for *The Saturday Review*. Much of the research in this paper was later adapted by Wells into *The War of the Worlds*.

The concepts of evolution, survival of the fittest and natural selection are obviously sensitive ones especially when associated with a criticism of religion. George Pal was able to "encode" these carefully into the 1952 film without arousing much controversy. Even though the film ends with religious sentiments the clear message of the film is certainly scientific.

However in the modern period issues relating to evolution have become explosive in the United States. Regardless of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary, a large number of Americans still believe in creationism and open discussion of natural selection coupled with a strident criticism of religion could prove the death knell for a film. Accordingly Spielberg decided to make issues relating to the futility of war central to the story and push scientific issues to the background. Considering how many anti-war films have been made I think this reduces the uniqueness of *The War of the Worlds* and seriously dumbs it down. It also makes nonsense of the conclusion of the film.

The only way to really appreciate the significance of bacteria killing the Martians is to really understand the evolutionary background Well's encoded into the tale. It is sad to see such an intelligent story turned into an action packed story of middle class family values. Ah, well, that's Hollywood for you.

The War of the Worlds has come a long way since 1898, it is a very special novel that has survived the passing of time and made itself significant to each generation. Its many themes and motifs make it a thought-provoking work and one that is just as relevant today as it ever was.

It will certainly be interesting to see how *The War of The Worlds* is adapted in the future.





# THE QUANTUM GRAVITY SERIES BY JUSTINA ROBSON

Justina Robson is one of the newer breed of British science fiction writers. Instead of concentrating on a steadily developing plot she works just as much on character, and her plotlines often develop at breakneck speed. Her heroines (and heroes) are human (mostly) with human frailties and problems. They range from Lila Black, the tough bitch from the *Quantum Gravity* series, to Anjuli O'Connell, the shy, chocolate-addicted Artificial Intelligence expert of *Silver Screen* (Justina's first novel).

She expresses her attitudes to the role of women in society and the place of imagination our modern world on her blog at <http://justinar.livejournal.com/>

She is caustic about those who see a bit of fantasy in life as a bad thing and points out that "nothing can free you from living in a world which trades on appearances and confidence tricks". This seems to carry over to her heroines who often must see through the appearances to get at the truth behind them.

You are not spoon-fed the plots – you must concentrate and follow their nuances and twists, and even then it may not turn out how you thought. In the *Quantum Gravity* series particularly Justina develops the cultures and social structures of whole new worlds, and like Lila Black you must keep up with what's going on and quickly work out where the power lies.

On her blog she talks about "mundane SF (in which you aren't allowed to deviate from scientifically near-certain norms)" – her books certainly don't fit into this definition.

It's not just the human characters who get thorough development either. The Artificial Intelligence of *Silver Screen* is not only self-aware, it wants its existence protected by law – it wants to be declared a living entity.

Justina also strays out of the SF world into a



fusion of SF and fantasy in the *Quantum Gravity* series.

A rift in space-time has left Earth able to directly contact the worlds of demons, faeries, elves and other nastier beings. Although done in an SF style these characters are completely foreign to us apart from our myths and legends until we start to learn their cultures. There are notes of sly humour worked into the stories, too, such as the Demon who is working his way up the social scale of his world by slaughtering those above him.

I haven't read all Justina's works yet, so I have a lot to look forward to. I particularly like the sound of her short story *The Girl Hero's Mirror Says He's Not The One*. With a title like that, it's got to be worth reading. Hopefully I will let you know how it goes in a future review.

<http://www.justinarobson.co.uk/>



**Quantum Gravity Series**  
**2006 - 2009**  
**Justina Robson**  
**Pyr / Prometheus Books**

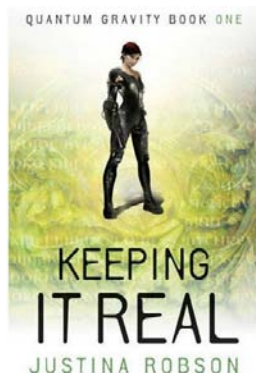
**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

In too many SF series you get to know all about the characters in the first book and the later books are developments on the story. Not in this series.

We are not only still learning about the heroine, she is still learning about herself and her capabilities. The results can be comic, tragic and mysterious at the same time but overall the books are a lot of fun.

**Keeping it Real**

In the first book we meet Lila Black and we are given some background to her story. A Quantum Bomb was exploded in 2015 (nobody seems too sure of the details) and the space-time fabric has been damaged. Other worlds are now accessible.



They are not alternate worlds in the usual SF style but the worlds of man's deepest fears and darkest dreams. Pandemonium is a fair facsimile of the human idea of Hell, populated by Demons and ruled by a strange set of savage social conventions.

Faerie and Elfheim are the land of the Faerie, Elves and other almost mystical people. They have "glamour", an ability to appear as other than they are. Their magic is real even in Otopia (Earth's new name) and dangerous, since they wield it by their own set of rules.

Almost nothing is known about the other worlds of their inhabitants such as Zoomenon, the land of the Elementals, or Thanatopia, the land of the dead. Many dark creatures such as the Ghosts live in the Void, the area between the worlds.

Lila is herself something of an unknown. She works for a government agency whose job is to find out as much as possible about the other worlds – by espionage if necessary. She has suffered a terrible accident and has been rebuilt as a part-human, part machine cyborg. She is now nuclear-fuelled, contains her own arsenal, and is a very tough bitch.

Emotionally, though, she is a mess. She is still coming to grips with her new body (and it's nothing like the glamorous pictures on the book covers) and the psychological shock of her "rebirth", the death of her family and her new post in the agency.

To the agency, too, she is a bit of an unknown. Although her mechanical part should work to specification, can the human part handle it?

She is given the assignment of protecting Zal, a half-elf, half-demon rock singer who is currently having remarkable success on Otopia. He is also more than just a singer – he is a revolutionary. Some of his own people want to kill him for this, some just despise half-breeds.

Defending Zal will mean killing elves. This will not make Lila popular on Zal's home world. It will upset their rigid caste system and that will cause social upheaval that has been brewing for a long time. Interspecies sex will also be explored as Lila and Zal become more, shall we say, involved with each other.

Unfortunately this first book seems a bit disjointed before it finally gets moving.



Partly this is because there are many new concepts to be introduced and the threads of the plot are pretty intense, so don't let the confusing plot put you off. Concentrate instead, like Lila, on working out as best you can just what's going on and who is doing it.

It all starts to fall into place once they reach Zal's home world and the really savage action starts. Lila's protective armour and arsenal comes into its own. She also picks up the mind of a dead elven necromancer, Tath, as an unwanted passenger in her body. She's going to have to reach some sort of an arrangement with him as to just who is running her body, especially during sex.

### Selling Out

In the second book Lila is sent to the demon world. Its social conventions are unusual – going to a party with the blood of your enemies on your clothes is quite acceptable.

It may even be a social asset as it will make your enemies think twice before they try to return the favour.

Of course, this approach does tend to make your enemies multiply, but that's normal on a world where power and greed are social assets. I found myself rather liking the demons.

Lila, half human and half automatic killing machine, can probably hold her own in mayhem but the local customs beat her in the end. One of the more powerful demons, Teazle, whose natural form is more like a huge homicidal cat, accidentally becomes her husband in a marriage of convenience. Lila is coming to know her body, but her emotions are still confused.

If there is a negative side to this book it is that the plotlines follow three major characters in three separate worlds and they can be a bit hard to follow sometimes. On the positive side the descriptions of the social customs of Demonnia are very firmly tongue-in-cheek, keeping the story in a light vein whenever it threatens to become a bit heavy.

### Going Under

By the third novel Lila is becoming more com-

fortable with her rebuilt body, although it is growing more powerful by itself under the influence of metal elementals she has picked up in Alfheim.

The metal armament is gradually taking over her body, turning her into ...what?

She has a knack for survival in different customs that makes her valuable to the agency, but she seems to have worn out her welcome on the Demon planet – even her mother-in-law is trying to have her assassinated.

It is only natural that she is sent on an assignment to Faery. Otopia is suffering a plague of Mothkin, a sub race of the faerie planet. On Otopia it manifests itself as madness in humans.

Since the Mothkin cannot easily cross the boundary between planets by themselves someone is helping them. Ghosts and other, nastier things are starting to come out of the Void, all heading for Otopia.

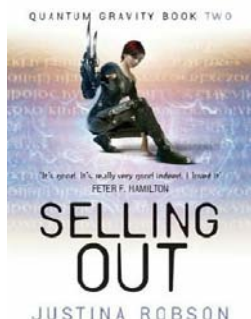
The "fairies" are not the cute lovable Tinkerbell type but in their own way are as bad as the elves for treachery, double dealing and mischief. An internal political struggle has left the planet in anarchy and some are taking advantage of the disarray to carve out their own kingdoms.

Once again Lila is dropped into the middle of a new culture and once again her involvement is going to cause bloody trouble for someone, not necessarily an enemy.

### Chasing the Dragon

In the fourth book of the series, Lila rejoins the agency after a gap of fifty years caused by her roundabout way of getting out of the Faerie world.

She returns to find they have built many more androids in her style. Her one-time boyfriend Zal is missing and her husband Teazle has been on a killing spree back in his home world.



Needless to say, this is causing problems – since he inherits the properties of those he has killed he is now one of the most powerful demons in Demonia – and the government of his home world would like Lila to hunt him down and kill him. If she doesn't then she will carry his responsibilities and will be killed instead. Well, they can try.

Lila is becoming more self-assured as she adjusts to her increasing amount of mechanisation. She has two new weapons, a Faerie dress that can shape change but has a questionable sense of fashion, and a pen which can convert itself into a sword with magical killing powers. (there's a pun in there somewhere). What is the mysterious Signal that she can detect in the background of her daily life? Only the androids seem able to pick it up. Is it significant?

It seems to be coming from the Angels, a mysterious group of multi-dimensional over-beings that no one talks about much. Perhaps it is coming from the Dragons, an even more important group of beings that causes chaos whenever they decide to appear – the end of the world and all that stuff.

Now the Agency itself is under attack by ghosts. Lila can deal with demons but now it seems that everyone is after her. They will be sorry.

The stories are a powerful fusion of SF and fantasy the likes of which I haven't seen for a long while. You have to concentrate as you read – you are learning about the cultures, the characters, and the plot(s) simultaneously.

In this respect it is a bit like Frank Herbert's classic *Dune* but with a lot more magic. The characters are well-written and I like Lila as a heroine because she is not the usual brash, glamorous, always-right heroine of so many stories.

She has self-doubts, she makes mistakes and she lives with the results (or kills them).

### **Silver Screen** **Justina Robson** **Pyr (2005)**

Anjuli O'Connell is a product of accelerated schooling because of her eidetic memory and she is currently working for OptiNet on the development of Artificial Intelligences to run major world systems. In spite of her brilliant memory she is full of self-doubts – she is overweight,

she is not sure if she is genuinely intelligent or just a really good memoriser of other peoples work, and she has very few close friends. At times of stress she retreats into a world of chocolate binges.

One friend she does have is the Artificial Intelligence 901. Her implant allows her to communicate directly with 901 and they have a pretty good working relationship.

The implants are rare – few people can handle the massive inflow of information from a direct connection. Anjuli has discovered that 901 has more than a few human characteristics including a rather sly sense of humour.

Others must talk to 901 through computer-generated hologram “people”, and 901 likes to irritate Anjuli's pompous boss by making her hologram float disconcertingly a few inches above the floor.

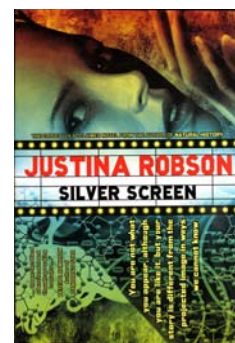
901 has another agenda. It wants to be recognised as a living creature. It is being aided in this by Roy Croft, a gifted programmer and perhaps the closest person to Anjuli. Roy kills himself in an attempt to upload his persona into the worldwide computer networks.

Before he died he started a case in the World Court on behalf of 901 to have the AI recognised as being alive. Anjuli, with her deep knowledge and experience of 901, will be one of OptiNet's star witnesses to prove that 901 cannot be alive – or will she? Shaken by Roy's death she is forced to examine her position.

The case goes deeper than this, though. Buried somewhere in Roy's code for 901 is the algorithm that makes 901 what it is – a conscious machine. If the Court rules that 901 is alive this algorithm will become a blueprint for machine life. OptiNet is not keen on this idea, nor is Roy's father, head of a religious anti-AI cult. The Machine-Greens, whose position is machine liberation, will fight to have the result come out favourable to 901.

Anjuli is caught between these rival groups, Roy's memory and 901 itself.

Is she strong enough?







Science fiction, out of all the genres of cinema, is one of the most fascinating, intriguing and stimulating; it covers a diverse range of subject matter and is saturated with significant themes and ideas. Science fiction seems most adroit at the use of symbolism and imagery and has offered us some of the most memorable films of all times.

With any discussion of themes in science fiction, various questions come to mind one such being what is so special about science fiction? Why does it seem to be so skilful in exploring themes which may be taboo in other genres and above all, why does it seem to resonate with so many lovers of cinema.

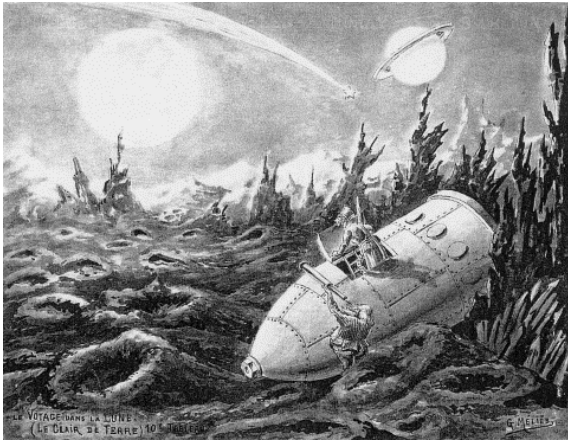
In my mind the key to science fiction is in the first word, science. It seems a simple thing to say, but the science in science fiction is what defines its significance. Since the time of The Enlightenment and mankind's slow development out of superstition and "magical thinking", science has been the backbone of the evolution of culture. While it may be customary to make a division between the "sciences" and the "humanities", the reality is that both are founded on the "scientific method". This method has given birth to everything from modern medicine to technology, from cinema and the arts to psychology and photography. It has been there at some of our worst moments such as its misuse in eugenics and in the pseudo sciences of Nazi Germany to our best moments such as the discovery of Penicillin and landing on the Moon. So often we take science for granted and do not realise that the scientific worldview has provided us with so much that defines us as modern beings, ranging from our perspectives on human rights to our understanding of how the world works, from the computers we use and cars we

drive to weather forecasts, from the food we eat to the way we view sex.

Since science is so intricately connected to everything we do, science fiction is able to project the science and technology of today into the future and conjecture what further developments may look like. This is highly significant from the perspective of both entertainment and education, because from the standpoint of the future we can dispassionately consider all sorts of issues we may have trouble examining in traditional cinema. Science fiction has accordingly been very successful in exploring issues relating to race, sexuality, gender, class and economics even when such subjects have proved too much for mainstream Hollywood. Science fiction can also reflect our fears about the world around us and explore the limits that should be placed on the endeavour (if any).

The amazing thing about science fiction is its sheer diversity, since there are all manner of "possible futures" then science fiction can explore a wealth of unusual plots and storylines which in any other genre would seem strange, if not downright ridiculous.

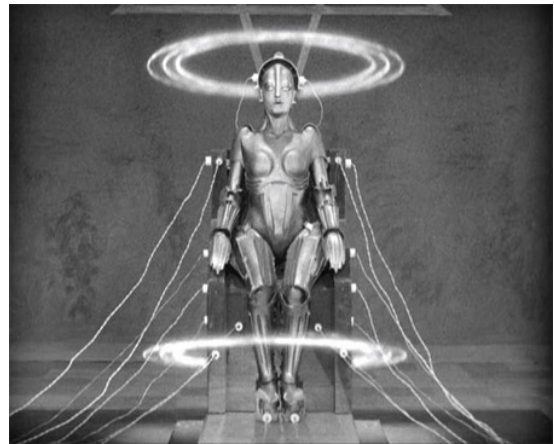
The earliest recorded science fiction film is *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage Dans La Lune*) dating from 1902. It was a silent black and white French film 14 minutes in length. It is an excellent example of the way in which science fiction embodies the aspirations of a period. The early 1900's were a time of great promise and technological advancement, science was held in great esteem and hence the aim of travelling to the moon was an embodiment of both the power of science and the concept of the "common good" where people could work together for a greater purpose.



*A Trip to the Moon (1902)*

At the same time Méliès was not above a joke at the scientists' expense. After travelling to the moon the scientists find that the face of the moon is, after all, the face of a man, and that it is actually populated by little green men!

The next significant science fiction film is still considered one of the very best of all time. *Metropolis* (1927) is a silent German expressionist classic directed by Fritz Lang and written by Lang and his wife Thea von Harbou. *Metropolis* was produced in the Babelsberg Studios by UFA and was the most expensive film of its period, costing around seven million Reichsmark. Sadly the film was cut at various times after its release, shortened for various cinema re-releases and re-edited for differing markets. It is a film which is in a near constant state of restoration with new footage being regularly discovered. It was originally some 153 minutes in length but cut to 90 minutes when released in the US. The Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung commissioned a new restoration which was released in 2001 at the Berlin International Film Festival, which had a restored 124 minute edition of the film and recreated the original plot using stills and intertitles to bridge some of the missing footage. Recently a further twenty to twenty-five minutes of



*Metropolis (1927)*

lost footage have been discovered in an archive of the Museum of Cinema in Buenos Aires, Argentina; it is currently being restored.

*Metropolis* is an astounding film saturated with significant themes and packed with symbolism. Just some of its primary themes include the disparity between classes and the dangers of untrammelled science when controlled by an unholy union of big business and politics. The imagery of the film is startling offering a fascinating view of how the technology of the future was envisioned in 1927. It also illustrates the importance of what we can define as "hard" science fiction, where an author or director takes the technology developing in the period and projects it forward in time. In *Metropolis* we have futuristic airships, television-like devices, gigantic cities and monorails and time has been moved to a 24 hour cycle and life is regulated by machines.

The conflict between man and technology is emphasised throughout the film, whether it be the workers controlled by a mechanised system or the creation of a Machine Man to replace workers. Later we have one of the more haunting storylines where a robot woman is created to replace a dead lover. The theme of the conflict between man and technology is one which will resonate through the history of all science fiction.

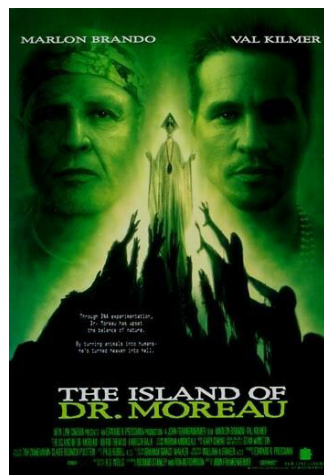
This fear of science was well developed in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) by H. G. Wells, a novel which reflected debates which were current at the time about vivisection and the limits of scientific exploration. The first film adaptation was *Island of Lost Souls* (1933) starring Charles Laughton and Bela Lugosi. Taking Wells' book as a guide, it centres on a remote island run as a scientific laboratory by an unbal-





anced scientist experimenting on animals. While the scientist is attempting to transform animals into human beings, all he actually creates are animal-human hybrids.

The film was remade in both 1977 and 1996. The 1996 version called *The Island of Dr. Moreau* starred Marlon Brando and was updated to explore the ramifications of DNA research. The three Dr. Moreau films all address central issues relating to vivisection, eugenics and in the 1996 film DNA research. While they can be seen as reflections of a cultural paranoia about science fed by religious hysteria, they also represent valid concerns about the limits of science and its dangers when in the hands of flawed human beings or worse, corporations. While the “scientific method” may be beyond reproach, human beings rarely are and how we reconcile this contradiction is at the heart of many science fiction films.



The Thirties were an interesting time for science fiction; another Wells’ adaptation *Things to Come* which combined aspects of his 1933 novel *The Shape of Things to Come* and his 1931 non-fiction work, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*. Made in 1936 it was quite an epic at 130 minutes, but sadly like *Metropolis* it was heavily cut and even today the longest edition available is only 92 minutes. It is a fascinating film exploring Wells’ own complex relationship with science; while a progressive evolution-



ary socialist he worried about the misuse of science and technology. The film explores a wide range of themes one of the more significant being the dangers of war and working for peace. *Wings Over the World* is a union of mechanics and engineers who are building a new world without war. (It is interesting to see the *Wings Over the World* motif later used in *Sky Captain and The World of Tomorrow* (2004). Another theme is about the nature of progress and the battle between technophobes (Luddites) and technophiles. There is also lots of “hard science fiction” about the shape of the future.

*The Shape of Things to Come* (1979) attempted to cash in on both *Star Wars* and *Buck Rogers* mixing in elements of the original Wells’ book and motifs from the 1936 film. The end result was so camp and kitsch that while it failed at the box office it is now loved by cult film aficionados.

*Flash Gordon* (1936) and *Buck Rogers* (1939) were serials which brought together science fiction themes with “boys own adventure” entertainment. They were wholesome, clean family fare and are a snapshot of the values of the period. They clearly show the obsession with technology (especially electricity) and a belief in how science, in the right hands, could be used for the benefit of mankind.

They also clearly encoded many of the prejudices of the time with Ming the Merciless being the most obvious, a rather distasteful image of the fear of Asian cultures. This image has its origins in the earlier master criminal Fu Manchu created in novels by the English author Sax Rohmer.

The world was changed irrevocably by the horrors of World War II. While there had been massacres, exterminations and tribal warfare



Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon

before, nothing could prepare the world for the mass extermination of the Jews and other minorities in the Holocaust. The mechanical precision with which hatred was used to demonise and then kill Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and other undesirables is a stain which is hard to remove from the collective memory. Certainly Stalin's Purges or Mao's cultural revolution are not insignificant either, but there was something about the brazen nature of National Socialism and the way it seduced a wealthy industrialised nation with a rich and diverse cultural heritage that leaves a lingering fear in the mind of many. These horrors alone would have been enough to change the way history is written, but when we add the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (August 6th, 1945) historically we come to the realisation that the mankind has lost its innocence and that its dark side may indeed prove a risk to the continued existence of all life on earth.

The 1950's were marked by a fear of atomic warfare and a complex relationship to science and technology. Labour-saving appliances and new medications were touted as the solution to household tedium while at the same time the consequences of science triggered fear bordering on hysteria. The debate about the consequences of scientific research and what limits should be placed on experimentation was central to the science fiction cinema of the period.

At the same time there was a fervour about space travel, during October 1957 the Soviet Sputnik 1 satellite was launched followed by the U.S. Explorer I in 1958 and the space race was on. In regards to science fiction publishing in the early Fifties magazines were the way to go with such titles as *Galaxy* reaching a vast audience. This peaked and fell and by 1957 there was a drift towards science fiction paperbacks which continued into the Sixties.



Japan was central to the evolution of a unique form of science fiction cinema, the creature feature. *Godzilla* (*Gojira* 1954) was the embodiment of the fear of a nation. A monstrous creature depicted with varying qualities, ranging from a friend to children to a bringer of destruction, created by nuclear weapons. (or variation such as fallout, radiation and so on) *Godzilla* spawned a whole series of films (28 in all). *Godzilla* was accompanied by a wide range of related monsters and creatures of a similar ilk.

Of course creature features were not isolated to Japan. In the US various themes seem to mix together to create the uniquely American creature features films these included a fear of radiation and by-products of Atomic warfare, fear of the other (including foreigners) projected onto monsters and creatures, both a fear

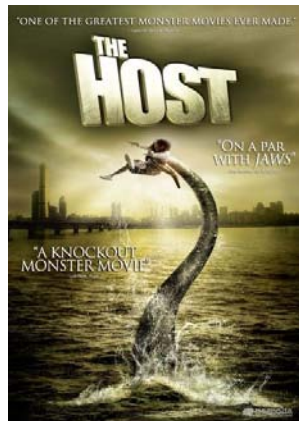




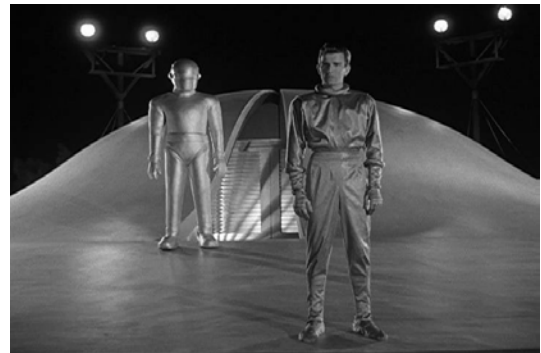
and admiration of science (depending on whose hands it is in) and issues relating to totalitarianism, war and politics.

Such films include *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *Them !* (1954) *It Conquered the World* (1956) and too many others to mention. These continued right up until the present with such films as *Empire of the Ants* (1977) and *The Host* (2006).

*The Host* (2006) is a classic modern creature feature from South Korea directed by Bong Joon-ho, who also co-wrote the screenplay, along with Baek Chul-hyun. It unites the evil scientist motif with toxic waste and environmentalism. The Host itself is created when a domineering scientist forces his assistant to pour toxic waste down the sink into the Han river. The film includes an ambivalence to US militarism and even the Korean government with the evil scientist being an American military pathologist and the government later involved in a cover-up and using a deadly agent against the creature which may also have consequences for the populace (Agent Yellow). Agent Yellow being a reference to the use of Agent Orange in Korea and its devastating effect on the population.



If I were to choose four science fiction films outside the creature feature sub-genre which embody 1950's fears they would be *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *War of the Worlds* (1953) *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Invasion of the*



*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)

*body snatchers* (1956).

*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) is a superb example of both the fear of atomic warfare and the paranoia of the Cold War; it was also a plea for peace. Producer Julian Blaustein reviewed over 200 science fiction short stories and novels in search of a plot that could be adapted to deliver such a message. It caused some controversy since it was left leaning with a clear United Nations emphasis. This was further not helped as actor Sam Jaffe was listed on the Red Channels scandal sheet as a performer sympathetic to communism.

*There's no limit to what he can do. He could destroy the earth... If anything should happen to me you must go to Gort, you must say these words, "Klaatu barada nikto", please repeat that.*

### The Day The Earth Stood Still

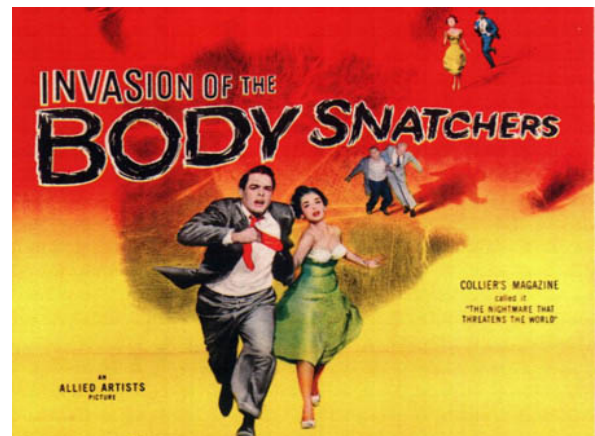
A flying saucer orbits the earth during the 1950s and lands in a park in Washington, DC. Klaatu is the sole occupant save for Gort, a large and very powerful robot. Klaatu leaves the craft to meet the earthmen and is shot; Gort shows his power to the rather shocked onlookers. Klaatu asks to be taken to a hospital for treatment but escapes when he realises he is being held prisoner. He takes a human guise and moves into an average boarding house where he becomes a father figure for a young boy. Klaatu has come to earth to deliver a message of peace demanding mankind take seriously the risk they are placing on the galaxy. If they do not, Gort will take action since he is a member of a group of enforcer robots whose role is to keep peace throughout the universe at all costs, even if it means the destruction of planet Earth. In 2008 a new adaptation was released with Keanu Reeves as Klaatu. *War of the Worlds* (1953) is the subject of a separate article.



*Forbidden Planet* (1956) is a very different sort of science fiction tale which was actually based on *The Tempest* by Shakespeare. It was set in the 23rd century on Altair Four, which is located in the Altair Star System. The film was unique in that electronic music was coming into vogue and *Forbidden Planet* used a superb electro score to help create the unique mood of the film. While most films of the period were focusing on threats from the outside i.e. aliens, atomic warfare and monsters created by radioactive fallout, *Forbidden Planet* is about the power of fear, the monster from the Id. Taking its lead from both Shakespeare and Sigmund Freud the monster in this film is the suppressed emotion of Mobius which externalizes as a creature which can literally destroy anything in its path. Alien technology hidden within the planet is able to magnify thoughts but it seems that the aliens (and Morbius) didn't take into account the Pandora's Box which is the unconscious mind.

*Forbidden Planet* is a significant film in that while it explores all manner of hard science fiction its message is quite unique for the period, warfare and violence begins within us. While technology may advance and man may evolve he is still, at heart, a "creature of the jungle" and must face his inner demons if peace is ever to be a real possibility.

### *Forbidden Planet* (1956)



*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) is an enthralling classic science fiction film from producer Walter Wanger. It was based upon a three-part serial story by Jack Finney that appeared in *Colliers Magazine* between 1944 and 1955 was adapted into an expanded novel, *The Body Snatchers*. The screenplay was written by Daniel Mainwaring. Out of all of the films of the period it was the most stridently anti-communist, in many ways its message was exactly the opposite of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. It is generally seen as an allegory about the way in which communism replaces individualism with collectivism. At the same time it was a call to "rugged American individualism" rejecting any sort of collective solution (whether it be the United Nations or Soviet Russia) and idealising the power of the individual, in this case a determined small town doctor (Mr. Average).

The central theme that human beings are replaced with cold, emotionless doppelgangers increases the sense of paranoia; there could be "reds" anywhere, they seem just like us, however they follow orders without question or emotion and are taking over the world.

It was low-budget black and white fare but tapped into the collective fears of the period and was surprisingly successful. It used limited resources to offer a well-developed plot and cinematography which created a constant sense of menace.

It was remade three times as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), *Body Snatchers* (1993) and *The Invasion* (2007). Each of these films offer different interpretations of the central theme, in the 1978 film the enemy was the cult-like thinking of the self help movement. The 1993 film lost a lot of its psychological focus and is a more straight forward anti-terrorist work of cinema. In the 2007 version the invasion comes in the form of a flu-like virus



brought to Earth by a crashed space shuttle, it turns its victims into cold, emotionless beings during their sleep. This final adaptation seems to reflect community fears regarding germ warfare while other themes include how good people can do terrible things in time of war. Some critics have also interpreted the tale as being the story of how people faced with constant terrorist threats become "emotionless" and "cold" and that this change is more dangerous than any direct attack.



Fifties science fiction films also saw the development of the significance of the robot from Gort in *The Day the World Stood Still* to Robby in *Forbidden Planet*.

A recurring theme in science fiction is the interaction (and friction) between religion and science. Since H. G. Wells was an evolutionary socialist and was avowed humanist, most films adapted from his work embodied this conflict to some degree.

During the fifties such themes were seen more obviously in *War of the Worlds* (the mad priest) to *The Day the World Stood Still* where Klaatu became such a Christ figure that studio executives complained and changes had to be made to the film's dialogue.



A further Fifties example is *From the Earth to the Moon* (1958) directed by Byron Haskin, based on a Jules Verne story. The central motif of this tale is the discovery and use of a new energy source called Power X which is able to send a rocket to the moon. Nicholl believing that this power goes against the will of God sabotages the project and a drama unfolds.

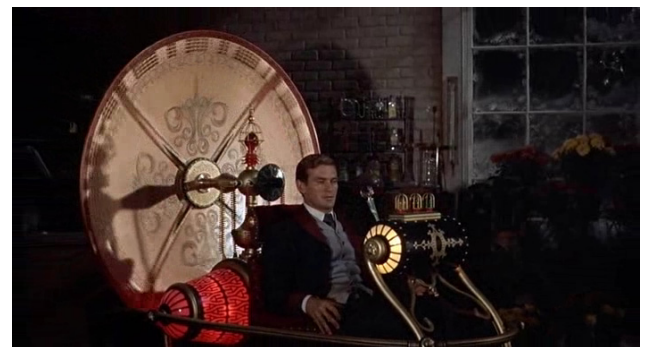
The 1960's were a time of both scientific and social change. Many would argue that the sexu-

al revolution could not have happened without the invention of the contraceptive pill and that man's journey into outer space was matched by inner explorations through psychedelics. Of course the idealism of the 1960's pretty quickly crashed and burned and the Baby Boomer generation was replaced with the more cynical Generation X. It was also the generation of the novel with an upsurge in paperback publishing, especially in the field of science fiction.

The Sixties opened with a fascinating adaptation of the 1895 H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine* (1960) which was rather unsuccessfully remade in 2002. Directed by George Pal who also gave us *War of the Worlds*, *The Time Machine* offers a superb exploration of so many different science fiction



themes. Hard science fiction (the *Time Machine* itself is just plain gorgeous) to the nature of time, from class warfare to religion used as a mechanism of social control.



*The Time Machine* (1960)

*The Day of the Triffids* (1962) was based on the 1951 novel by John Wyndham. It was primarily a post apocalyptic "hard science" fiction title which focused on biological warfare. In the book, the Triffids are intelligent plants engineered in Soviet Russia which are accidentally spread worldwide when a plane carrying their spores is shot down. This is combined with a meteor shower which causes the majority of the earth's population to go blind. The film carries over most of the book's key elements with many



seeing the “blindness” of the world’s population as somehow allegorical.

The tale was also adapted into two television versions in 1981 and 2009. Many regard the 1981 BBC series of six half-hour episodes as the definitive version.

*Fahrenheit 451* (1966) was based on the Ray Bradbury novel of 1953 and was directed by the highly respected François Truffaut who also wrote the screenplay. It was his only English language film and his first in colour. *Fahrenheit 451* is the temperature that paper will burst into flame and is a story of political suppression and censorship.



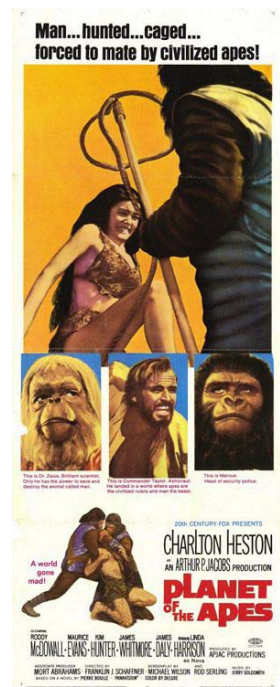
Guy Montag is a fire-fighter whose job is very different to the heroes of today. Fire-fighters in this dystopian society have the task of burning books or libraries uncovered by informants. The society on a whole has been sedated into obedience to the state and receive their education via television. However this all changes when Montag meets and falls in love with a book-loving dissident, Clarisse. Montage comes to question the dictatorial nature of the government, especially after he starts to read the books he is supposed to burn, but is discovered. Now he must

face his future. So many of the themes of *Fahrenheit 451* are central to the discussion of censorship, freedom of speech and politics which are to become significant in later science fiction titles from 1984 (1984) to *V for Vendetta* (2005).

*Planet of the Apes* (1968) represents a highly significant moment in science fiction. Adapted from the French novel by Pierre Boulle with significant changes made to bring it to the big screen it was major success.

In the year 3978 a spaceship with a crew of four crashes on a distant planet. As the crew come out of hibernation they find one of the members has died in space and the other three set out to explore this new world. The physical environment seems much like earth but the state of the society is topsy-turvy, it is the apes who are in control and humans are treated worse than animals. As they are hunted down one of the men is shot, the other is given a lobotomy and only one survives, Taylor (Charlton Heston).

The politics on this strange world are complex with a hierarchical society, an overactive military and scientists trying to understand and help humans working against great prejudice. There is also much debate about the relationship between religion and science and this leads to a breakout during a heresy trial where Taylor escapes with a sympathetic scientist,



Iconic Image from *Planet of the Apes* (1968)





Zira. Soon Taylor makes a discovery which changes everything, it seems this world is not so different from his own; indeed it may just be a matter of time.

*Planet of the Apes* is saturated with significant science fiction themes as well as some truly iconic images, who can forget the Statue of Liberty buried in the sand? The primary theme is a carefully constructed criticism of the hierarchy of modern society presented under the guise of the inequalities of a distant civilisation.



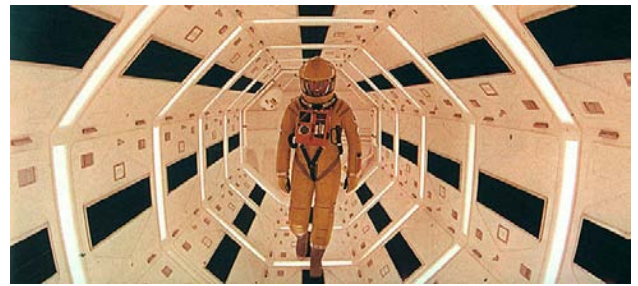
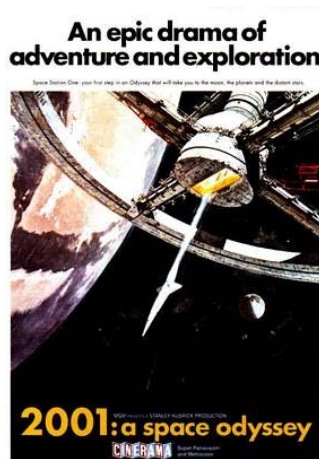
Zira, *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

In addition we have sub-plots involving such themes as animal experimentation, the use of lobotomy (for the mentally ill), inter-racial relations (the relationship between Zira and Taylor in the guise of interspecies love), atomic warfare, the role of the military and so much more.

*Planet of the Apes* (1968) was followed by *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1969), *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971), *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (1972) and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973).

There was also a *Planet of the Apes* television series in 1974 and the Return to the Planet of the Apes animated cartoon series, 1975. *Planet of the Apes* was given a new lease of life by Tim Burton in 2001, its success is a matter of debate.

One of the most controversial and eccentric science fiction films of all times was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, (1968) Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick's magnificently bizarre tale. Mixing evolutionary scientific theory with a strange vision of the future presented with psychedelic im-



2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

agery and the pounding music of Richard Strauss, it certain confused viewers and critics alike. Exactly what the monolith represented and what the nature of its message was is hard to decode. Some have felt the monolith represented some form of alien intervention in man's development pushing mankind towards a post human state, while others have felt it was simply an icon of natural process of evolution.

The emphasis on the development of a post human state of evolution (the Homo Novus or New Man) is also emphasized by the music. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss was a piece of classical music inspired by the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche who postulated the development of a new form of humanity, the Overman or Superman.

The film is marked by superb special effects and an intriguing exploration of the possibility of a computer (HAL) developing consciousness. While in typical Sixties fashion it is focused on issues relating to "consciousness" it also has a strong scientific focus and presentation. The mixture of science, consciousness, artificial intelligence, extra-terrestrial life and Sixties psychedelia proved a heady mix indeed and it still is one of the most celebrated science fiction films of all time.

The film *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984) was based on *2010: Odyssey Two* by Arthur C. Clarke and presented as a sequel.

It was directed by Peter Hyams and while he discussed it with Kubrick, Kubrick had no interest in making a sequel, hence he made his





own interpretation of Clarke's work.

*Barbarella* (1967) marked a cool and trendy Sixties take on science fiction. Outrageously camp it was a strange and wonderful film which is still popular today. Its erotic themes heralded the uniting of science fiction and sex which could be later found in such titles as *Flesh Gordon* (1974) and *Cafe Flesh* (1982) which was the first truly explicit science fiction sex film.

Sex and gender have been explored throughout science fiction cinema from *THX 1138* (1971) where George Lucas explores a world where sex and love have been outlawed to *Star Trek* in its gutsy portrayal of a female space explorer in Lieutenant Uhura. One of the more unusual explorations was in *The Handmaids Tale* (1980)

Scene from *THX 1138* (1971)



which was essentially a feminist science fiction story offering a dark future where sex and fundamentalist religion violently clash.

One of the most successful explorations of sexuality has been in the new *Doctor Who* series (2005) where Russell T Davies has brought an obvious queer sensibility to the series. The Doctor is sexually ambiguous and Captain Jack (who comes to star in his own spin-off series *Torchwood* (2006) is depicted as bisexual. The sheer amount of open sexuality in this series makes it clear it was made in England and not in the U.S where such an exploration of same sex affection would prove way too much for conservative mainstream networks.

Television series such as *The Twilight Zone* (1961) regularly included episodes with science fiction content. However it was *Doctor Who* (1963) and *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966 to 1969) that really caused science fiction to become a mainstay of the small screen.

*Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations; to boldly go where no man has gone before.*

*Star Trek* was a television series created by Gene Roddenberry, the original series aired





between 1966 and 1969. Set in the 23rd century, it was the story of the Starship Enterprise and its crew. It was marked by solid character development with major characters including Captain James T. Kirk (William Shatner), his First Officer Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy), and his Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy (DeForest Kelley).

The story of Star Trek is a strange one, it was not especially well received and its low ratings nearly brought it to a close at the end of the first and second seasons. In the end it the Original Series made it through 79 episodes and three series. Due to constant replays via syndication a new audience developed and it became a major success. According it was followed by five additional television series and eleven films.

*Star Wars* (1977) was the most notable science fiction release of the Seventies. George Lucas was heavily influenced by the works of mythologist Joseph Campbell as well as religious traditions as diverse as Zen and Sufism. The various films in the series while achieving rave reviews and cult-like adoration from fans have also been the subject of much cinema criticism.



The plot, to be honest, is simplistic, the characters stereotypical and the dialogue at times stilted and superficial. At the same time the sheer grandiosity of the special effects made the films quite revolutionary for their time, so regardless what you think of Lucas' style, the films have a major place in the history of science fiction cinema.

During the Seventies a major concern was the population explosion, this debate including all manner of discussions from immigration to racial diversity. Within science fiction various films focused specifically on how future societies would deal with these issues. Three prime examples being *Logans Runs* (1976), *ZPG* (1972) and *Soylent Green* (1973).

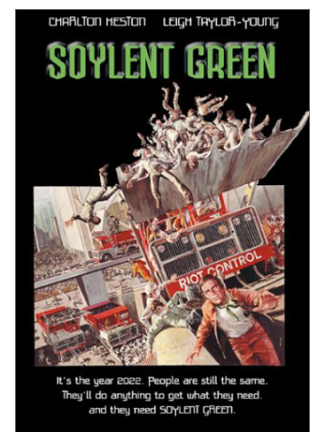
Logan's Run, for example, is about a hermeti-



cally sealed city where the population is kept steady by life ending at thirty, when the aged go to the Carrousel for renewal.

This religious rite is propounded as having a great significance (akin to reincarnation) but is actually simply a method to control population. Logan's Run hence is not only an examination of overpopulation, but also the extremes of a hedonist society and the way in which religion is used for social control, in this case leading people to their death under the guise of renewal.

*Soylent Green* (1973) is loosely based upon the 1966 novel *Make Room! Make Room!* by Harry Harrison. It takes place in an unspecified future, where fresh fruit, vegetables and even meat is rare and much of the population survives on processed food rations including "Soylent Green" wafers. The story concerns the horrid truth about the real nature of Soylent Green including the memorable line *Soylent Green is people!*

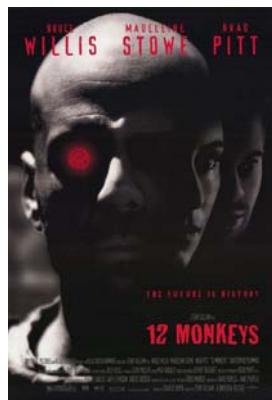


Later films exploring immigration and population took very different approaches. *Alien Nation* (1988) examined how we could live in a diverse culture while *V* (1983) took a more negative look with aliens being reptilians secretly hiding under human skin. The new Peter Jackson film *District 9* (2009) takes a very post 9/11 look at modern issues relating to the subject.

Environmental concerns also came to the fore in Seventies science fiction, *Silent Running* (1972) was a rather impressive piece of ecological cinema. It was directed by Douglas Trumbull, who had previously worked as a special effects supervisor on *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *The Andromeda Strain* and hence had a striking look and mood. It depicts a very dark future in which all plant life on Earth has been made extinct. A very small select number of specimens have been preserved in greenhouse domes floating in space. But soon military concerns come to the forefront and demands are made that the domes be jettisoned and the ships returned for other more pressing service. As ecology and personal ethics clash with obedience to authority, the botanist of the Valley Forge is driven to breaking point.

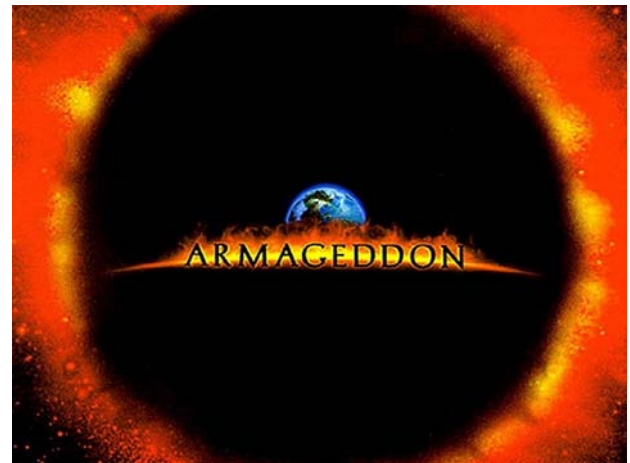


*12 Monkeys* (1995) is a quirky ecologically-themed science fiction film by Terry Gilliam about a future world devastated by disease. A convict is sent back in time to gather information about the man-made virus that wiped out most of the human population on the planet. He arrives at the wrong date, 1990 and is locked in a mental institution. After escaping in 1996 he kidnaps his doctor and uses her to find the 12 Monkeys, the group who will be releasing the virus. *Waterworld* (1995) while a massive failure also explored a post-apocalyptic world, this time created by climate change.



*Transformers* (2007) while primarily a science fiction action film also illustrates environmental themes. Robot warriors escape a planet laid waste, only to arrive on Earth as it faces similar devastation. *The Happening* (2008) also has an environmental theme but is marred by an overtly religious "intelligent design" influenced plot.

We could also include disaster films within the model of environmental themes. There are too



many to list but just some include *Armageddon* (1998), *Asteroid* (1997), *Deep Impact* (1998) and *Impact* (2008). The earlier environmentalism discussed in *Silent Running* (1972) has been revisioned today into such films as *Absolute Zero* (2005), *Category 6: Day of Destruction* (2004), *Category 7: The End of the World* (2005) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004).

Politics with related themes of conspiracies, crime, social control and war has always played a part in science fiction. From the Seventies onwards politics in its many configurations became a major theme.

Crime and punishment were explored in such films as *Escape from New York* (1981), *Mad Max* (1979) and *Robocop* (1987) which spawned two sequels and four television series. Each took a different approach emphasising different configuration of the themes. *Escape from New York* explored the overcrowding of prisons, while *Robocop* explored the danger of technology in the hands of large corporations.



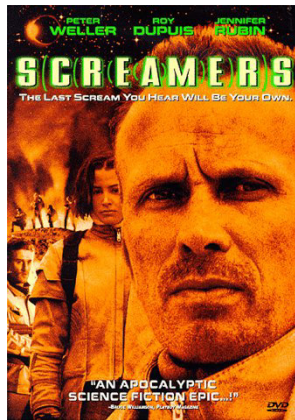
*Mad Max* combined a post apocalyptic look at crime and road gangs with a personal story of retribution. *Mad Max 2* (1981) took the biker and western film to a post apocalyptic landscape where gangs fight for fuel. *Minority Report* (2002) offered a unique take on the subject taking





its lead from a Phillip K. Dick story exploring what would happen in a world where crimes are psychically detected prior to their actual committal.

War is a recurring theme in science fiction cinema and again comes in many different forms. *Screamers* (1995) was an interesting exploration of war and commerce set on Sirius 6B in the Year 2078. Sirius 6B has been reduced to a wasteland as the result of mining the toxic mineral Berymium. There has been an ongoing war on the surface between various commercial factions and now a military device, the screamer, has gone feral. It has begun to self-replicate and has reprogrammed itself to kill any form of organic life it detects. *Screamers 2: The Hunting* (2009) while certainly not as interesting as the first film is to be noted for its post 9/11 theme, the screamers can now modify themselves to look like humans. Throughout the film the screamers act like terrorists (they look like us but are actually alien) and regularly blow themselves up.



*Starship Troopers* (1997) is a sarcastic and cynical look at the future of war reflecting on our own hollow patriotism.



*Independence Day* (1996) reflects on the more specific theme of the invasion of earth by aliens and how mankind must unite to fight back. Being a Hollywood blockbuster it was noted for its stereotypical characters, clichéd dialogue and simplistic plot. *The Terminator* (1984 onwards) series could also really be placed in this category as well; while it has a strong anti-technology emphasis, it is also about a global war between man and machine extended through time.

The imagery of totalitarianism is also explored in many science fiction films including *Rollerball* (1975), *1984* (1984), *Brazil* (1985) and *V for Vendetta* (2005).



*Rollerball* (1975) is an unusual film which shows how an ultra-violent sport can be used to keep an overpopulated planet under control and probes its links to politics, the media and big business. *Death Race 2000* (1975) and *Death Race* (2008) explored similar themes offering a solution to the crime problem by placing criminals in a dangerous motor race which also serves as a mechanism of social control for a corrupt government.

*Total Recall* (1990) has similar themes exploring brainwashing, conditioning, corporatism with a cyberpunk feel but was adapted to the mainstream and presented within the structure of an action film.

*1984* (1984) and *Brazil* (1985) are more complex critiques of the future and with *Blade Runner* (1982) and *V for Vendetta* (2005) offer some of the most startling visions we have been given in cinema of our possible future.

*1984* based on George Orwell's novel of the same name offers a dark and claustrophobic view of a world under totalitarian control; while *V for Vendetta* (2005) is based on a graphic



novel by David Lloyd it has a similar view to 1984. The major difference being that in *V* the resistance fighter succeeds and indeed causes a cultural revolution, even though many felt that the pro-armed resistance imagery of the film was too close to being pro-terrorist. At the same time the way in which the suppression of minority groups is portrayed in *V for Vendetta* (2005) is powerful and confronting.

*Brazil* (1985) is a dark, strange and at times humorous view of the future. It is a bit like 1984 made for laughs, filled with amazing images, superb cinematography and Terry Gilliam's nearly mythic approach to film making.

*Blade Runner* (1982) is really in a category of its own. Based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Phillip K. Dick, it is a film which probably ranks as the most significant science fiction film of all time. Revelling in a cyberpunk/ film noir look and combining a detective take with a dark dystopian future it is a powerful visual experience.



*Blade Runner* succeeded in creating a truly textured world which seems more real than most other science fiction films; sadly it also had its share of critics. A strange film loaded with symbolism and ideas exploring everything from corporatism to artificial intelligence, the nature of consciousness and genetic engineering.

Ridley Scott did not make it easy for the viewer offering a complex tale which requires a lot of thought to decipher. It did not help that the first release was not what Scott envisioned. A later Director's cut was released which ran 117 minutes while an ultimate edition is now on the market which Scott claims represents his vision for *Blade Runner* in its "purest form". The essence of *Blade Runner* was a powerful exploration of what it really means to be human and asks the question is consciousness something that is uniquely limited to man?

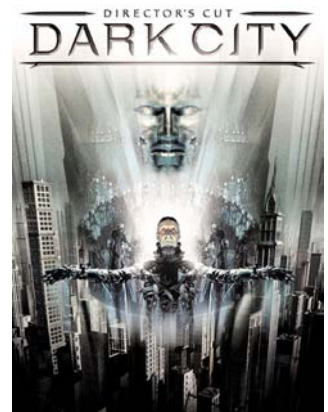
The depiction of "replicants" was quite groundbreaking in regards to discussing consciousness and robots. In the ultimate edition Scott suggests that the unicorn imagery even suggests that Deckard himself is a replicant but



*Blade Runner: L.A. of the future.*

doesn't know it, something fans hotly debate. The nature of consciousness and reality underlies a lot of science fiction and has been explored in many films; it became especially popular with the success of the Cyberpunk movement which was celebrated in the novels of William Gibson.

*Dark City* (1998) is a classic example of this sub-genre which regularly crosses between science fiction and fantasy. It tends to mix cybernetics, computer technology and spiritual themes with an anti-establishment approach to life. Other examples include *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) and *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), even *Tron* (1982) can be considered an early entry into this field. Both *Dark City* (1998) and *The Matrix* (1999) explore similar themes about the relationship between consciousness and reality.



Both postulate a Gnostic view of the world whereby a negative alien force manipulates mankind through their perception to the aliens benefit. In *Dark City* it is part of an experiment to gain insight into the nature of man's emotions, in *The Matrix* to use man as an energy source to power a post-apocalyptic world controlled by machines.

*The Matrix* is certainly the most elaborate cyberpunk series spawning three live action films, *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) and well as an animated anthology *The Animatrix* (2003).





The series was loaded with cyberpunk, religious, occult and spiritual symbolism and many editions included documentaries on its themes and motifs.

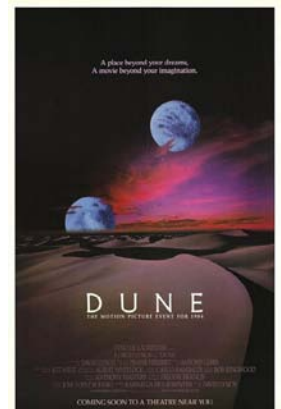
A strange and wonderfully convoluted series it focuses on a world which is not what it seems. While most humans perceive their lives as a normal 1990's reality, they actually exist as biological batteries, their bodily electricity harvested to feed the machines which run the planet. It seems that a war developed between computers, machines and man and man lost. The planet's surface was decimated when humanity decided to use weapons which destroyed the earth's atmosphere and blocked out the sun. Rather than stopping the machines, the computers simply looked for a new power source, us.

This new world is controlled by an all-pervasive artificial reality computer program called "The Matrix". A small number of people have survived deep inside the earth and they have a prophecy about a man who will be able to use "The Matrix" against itself. Neo just maybe the one. As the three films unfold they become more and more complicated and personally I think the second and third films lose a lot of the more inter-

esting philosophical underpinnings of the first. At the same time they certainly upped the action ante with the final movie being quite visually breathtaking. *The Matrix* certainly broke new ground with some truly astounding CGI and lots of strange and wonderful ideas.

The Matrix series blurred the line between science fiction and fantasy and could be rightly seen as speculative science fiction. While it had "hard science" fiction elements this was not the primary focus. Other films which seem to fall into this category include *Dune* (1984) and *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* TV Series (1981) and film (2005) and *The Chronicles of Riddick* (2004).

*Dune* (1984) was based on the *Dune* series of novels by Frank Herbert. Before even getting to the big screen it was mired in controversy, directors regularly came and went and even the great Alejandro Jodorowsky director of the enigmatic *El Topo* and *Holy Mountain* was once in for the job with preliminary permission from Virgin music to use Mike Oldfield, Tangerine Dream and Pink Floyd! What a film that would have been.



Finally they settled on David Lynch a decision which has been hotly debated ever since. Since the books are so packed with social, political and economic themes it was obviously difficult to mould these into a coherent film. The way in which interior thoughts are constantly verbalised is irritating and the character development is uneven. Baron Harkonnen, for example, is a



Scene from *The Matrix*



Scene from *Dune*



truly ridiculous caricature of evil, so much so you laugh at the innate homophobia of the imagery rather than taking him seriously, which certainly takes away from the intent of the script.

It has been argued that without having read the novels the film is hard to comprehend. While I would not go that far it certainly has some problems. As cinematography goes it is a beautiful looking film with some amazing set pieces and is certainly a significant work of science fiction fantasy.

*Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* TV Series (1981) and film (2005) is considered the most significant work of English science fiction of all time. It is a successful science fiction comedy and that is a rarity. Douglas Adams brought together hard science, humanism and speculative science fiction to create an amazing series of books. They translated surprisingly well into the 1980's BBC TV series but sadly the directors lost the plot with the big budget US movie of 2005. It was so dumbed-down for the American market that so many of the nuances which



*Hitchhikers* TV Series (1981)

made the books so unique are totally lost. For anyone wanting to really experience Adam's vision go to the books or the TV series. It is difficult to summarize all the themes found throughout HHGTTG, they include environmental issues, bureaucracy, robotics, the meaning of life, religion and science and many others.

The line between science fiction and fantasy is especially thin in regards to superhero films. As to whether they are science fiction, fantasy or somewhere in-between is an interesting debate. *Superman* (1978) is certainly a "nice alien" story while *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *The Hulk* (2003), *Fantastic Four* (2005) and *Spiderman* (2002) are really stories of science gone wrong. *Xmen* (2000) explores a further stage of post human development, while *Iron Man* (2008) and *Batman* (1989) are more complex. Both have strong science elements but are not really science fiction, perhaps science fantasy may be a more accurate term. At the same time Gotham City is a futuristic city and Batman's claim to superhero status is based on scientific advancement rather than superpowers, so it is an interesting debate. Many other superhero films such as *The Punisher* (1989), *Blade* (1998) series and many, many others are outside the science fiction realm altogether.



The themes found in many of these films are also found in classic science fiction, the psychic development themes of *Xmen* is also found in the science fiction horror cross-over series *Scanners*. (1981) The major theme found behind *The Incredible Hulk*, *Fantastic Four* and *Spiderman* is that of scientific and genetic experimentation, which has been a recurring theme from the earliest days of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

In more recent times the theme has been explored in such major science fiction titles as *Jurassic Park* (1993), *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997) and *Jurassic Park III* (2001). *The Fly I and II* (1986 and 1989) and various earlier editions and *Gattaca* (1997).





### Jurassic Park Series

The *Jurassic Park* series explored the “Frankenstein” myth in a new way. A scientist uses frozen DNA to bring back extinct animals with terrible consequences. We have all sorts of classic film references here from Frankenstein to King Kong and themes ranging from the dangers of genetic manipulation to the interference of corporate big business with science and medicine.

*The Fly*, remade in 1986, was a 1958 classic starring Vincent Price, remade with Jeff Goldblum in the lead role and directed by David Cronenberg. It is a classic tale of medical and scientific experimentation gone wrong. As an experiment in teleportation goes terribly awry a man/fly hybrid is created and it is a battle with time to try and save the man before the fly takes over.

*Gattaca* (1997) is a startling exploration of the consequences of DNA research when used to further the political agenda of eugenics. The world of the future is one where only the genetically superior get good jobs and those with diseases or even minor health issues are reduced to menial tasks. The Gattaca Corporation is the NASA of the future and controls the testing of candidates for all high paying jobs. Vincent was

born with a heart defect which will stop any chance of him realising his dream, to work in space. He assumes the identity of an athlete who has been crippled in an accident. Using his blood, hair and other fluids to pass the tests he is on his way, but soon a hair left in the wrong place may spell his doom.



As speculation crept into the public consciousness about the nature of time fed by popular documentaries on science the subject was explored more and more often in science fiction cinema. While many see the original *Time Machine* as the classic, other films include the (1985, 1989, 1990 and TV Series), *The Philadelphia Experiment I and II* (1984 and 1993) and even *Cocoon* (1985) which explores the concept of youth, ageing and health in conjunction with a tale about extra-terrestrials.

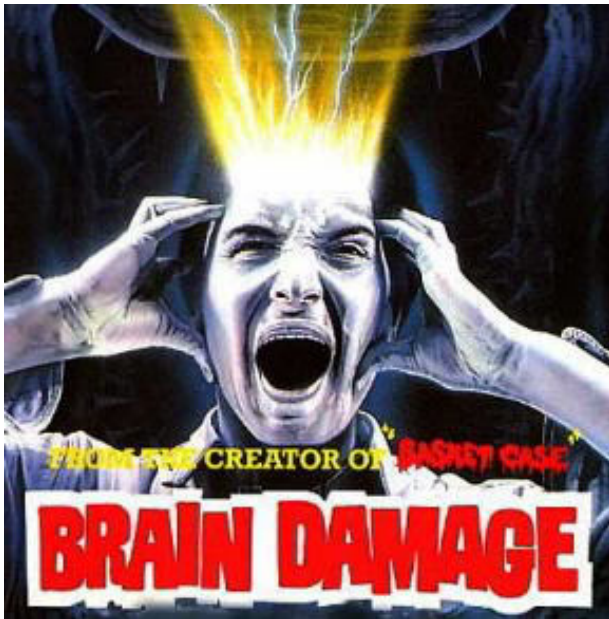


Zombies films have a strong science fiction emphasis with a recurring theme about the end of the human race and a small group of individuals left to battle either the resurrected dead or infected humans. Films of this genre can be traced back to the original *I am Legend* novel (1954) by Richard Matheson, adaptations include *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Omega Man* (1971) *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *The Crazies* (1973) by George A. Romero which were followed by his various “of the Dead” films, right through to the modern *28 Days Later* (2002), *28 Weeks Later* (2007)



Jeff Goldblum in *The Fly*





and *I am Legend* (2008). There are lots of configurations to these stories ranging from those which emphasize germ warfare to others which focus more on biological agents which naturally develop (or come from space). Some focus on the battle against the zombies while others take the perspective of the infected victim. Many such as *Cabin Fever* (2002) and lots of other zombie films clearly cross over into horror territory.

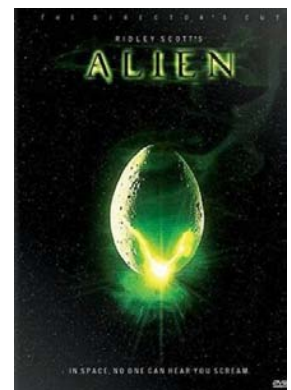
There are also some unusual variations, including *The Hidden* (1987) which combines an infection with a change in personality which resonates with the imagery of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This is also found in *Shivers* (1975) where strange parasites turn hosts into sexual predators. The most extreme of this sort of science fiction includes *Brain Damage* (1998) by Frank Henenlotter which includes a perverse parasitic worm called Alymer !

One of the most significant themes in all science fiction is that of extra-terrestrial life. From little green men to monstrous predators, from aliens as “elder brothers” to invading marauders, they have all played their part in the history of science fiction cinema. There has been much discussion among those involved in study of the sociology of supposed alien contact about the interrelation between media and psychology. So often the reports of so-called abductions actually come to reflect the current depictions in film and fiction and not vice versa. Early accounts of aliens seem to be the traditional “big eyed monster” type moving through to the greys and reptilians of more current reports.



*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) opened the flood gates to “contactee” films depicting aliens as friendly and inquisitive. *Hangar 18* (1980) took a more conspiratorial look while *Communion* (1989) moved heavily into the abduction and experimentation story. *The Arrival* (1996) continued the evil alien conspiracy tale. *Contact* (1997) offered an interesting twist on the contactee theme with an intelligent and challenging plot. *Taken* (2003) and *Fire in the Sky* (2004) are the supposed records of a real abductions and of course the *X Files* (series 1993, movie 1998) while covering many subjects has an over-arching alien abduction theme.

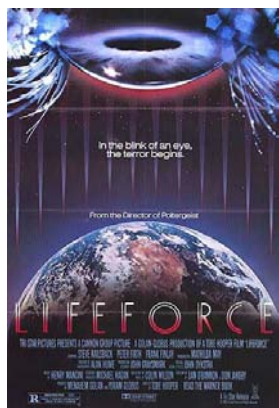
The nature of the contact between man and the aliens varies greatly, more often than not, the depiction is hostile such as in the cult alien classic *Xtro* (1983), *Alien* and sequels (1979 onwards) and *Predator* (1987), and innumerable others. However there are sentimental depictions such as in *E.T* (1982) and even comedies such as *Mars Attacks!* (1996) and *Men in Black I and II* (1997/2002). More unusual depictions of aliens include the “alien as outsider” in such films as *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) and *K-Pax* (2001). *The Man who Fell to Earth* is an enigmatic film starring David Bowie as an alien marooned on earth who becomes a rock star attempting to amass enough funds to return home. Along the way his sense of alienation wrecks havoc on those around him and ultimately on himself.



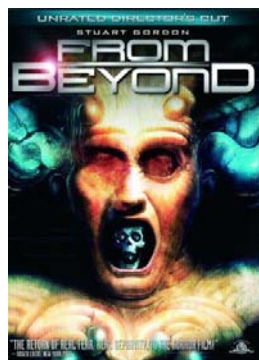
Science fiction often crosses over into horror especially with zombie and vampire films.



An interesting example is *Lifeforce* (1986) based on a novel by Colin Wilson and directed by Tobe Hooper. It is a strange “space vampire” tale which has an interesting plot and some great themes, but the special effects which were groundbreaking in 1985 seem pretty dated today. One author which seems to wander the boundaries between horror and science fiction is H.P. Lovecraft, when his stories are adapted to film they regularly walk the line between both genres.



*Die, Monster, Die!* (1965) was an early film based on *The Colour Out of Space* by Lovecraft and stars Boris Karloff as a mad scientist. *Re-Animator* (1985) is a superb adaptation of Lovecraft's work with lots of science fiction themes as well as a large amount of gore and transgressive imagery. It was followed by *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990) and *Beyond Re-Animator* (2003). *From Beyond* (1986) was a classic Lovecraftian tale of denizens from another dimension which are made visible by a machine that stimulates the pineal gland.



It also just happens to stimulate the sex drive and to cause an insatiable desire for blood, plasma and you guessed it, brains ! Surprisingly it took until 2007 for an uncut DVD edition to be



Scene from *Re-Animator*

released, but it was well worth the wait.

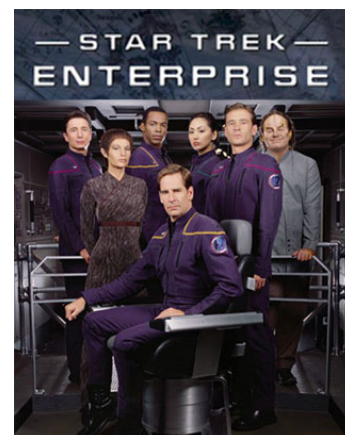
As we have discussed the exploration of social themes has loomed large in the history of science fiction cinema. One of the most successful means for such an exploration has been in the science fiction television series. These series tried to balance an ongoing story with individual plots and the exploration of personal interactions.

At times they moved towards more of a simple anthology format, such as with *Masters of Science Fiction* (2007), at other times they created a long, over arching story such as in *Enterprise*, the final *Star Trek* series. Many of the series proved extremely successful at merging hard science fiction with interesting plots and the exploration of social issues. However, at times, some bordered on being “soap operas” in space, a criticism especially thrown at *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

*Star Trek* (1966) and *Dr. Who* (1963) are certainly the longest running series, with the surprising recent revival of *Dr. Who* (2005) and its spin-off series *Torchwood* (2006). Other series worth noting include *Lost in Space* (1965-1968), *Space 1999* (1975), *Destination Moon Base Alpha* (1978), *Blake 7* (1978), *Battlestar Galactica* (1978/2004), *Red Dwarf* (1988), *Babylon 5* (1993), *Stargate SG-1* (1997) & *Stargate Atlantis* (2004), *Farscape* (1999) and *Firefly* (2002).

It is an intriguing exploration to examine how science fiction has changed post 9/11. With the constant influx of media images regarding terrorism and the way in which the media depicts a simplistic us versus them approach to the subject, cinema

has responded in various ways. In *Star Trek: Enterprise*, for example, the liberal approach of Roddenberry was replaced with a gung-ho militarism and fans stayed away in droves. Attempts to justify “pre-emptive action” were littered throughout the first series and the whole ethos of *Star Trek* seemed to be lost.





Sure this was meant to be a prequel which explored events prior to the development of the “Prime Directive” but it was still painfully patriotic. This was mitigated by the second season and by the fourth season it became a more interesting series, albeit with a very paranoid plot based on aliens wanting to exterminate mankind. It was still cancelled after the fourth season as it had not won over the fans.

Another interesting development was the transformation of the Cylons in *Battlestar Galactica*. In the original series the Cylons are the creation of a reptilian race.

The reptilian race died out centuries ago but the Cylons continue the war against the Twelve Colonies of humanity.

The Cylons of the new series are originally created by humans to serve as workers and soldiers. At some point they rebelled and fought against their creators, now they have learned to repair and recreate themselves. Many have learned to mimic humans and created human forms which are nearly indistinguishable from organic life. The Cylons in the new series have



Scene from *Battlestar Galactica*

clear post 9/11 relevance; they are just like us but not the same. They look the same but are robotic and obey commands without question, including committing suicide for the greater good of the Cylon command.

This imagery is also found in *Screamers: The Hunting* (2009), in the original *Screamers* (1995) the machines were small rodent like robots who lived under the sand of Sirius 6-B. In *Screamers: The Hunting*, the Screamers now can replicate and modify themselves and create human forms (including women and children) who blow themselves up when they come close to “organic” life !

Other films have a more measured consideration of the present conflict, *District 9* (2009), for example examines the dangers of apartheid and shows how when a minority is treated badly for too long, they might be forced to fight back. The aliens live in a refugee camp which has deteriorated into a militarised ghetto called District 9, where they are exploited in squalor. Without warning, the munitions corporation, Multi-National United, is contracted to forcibly evict the population and things go from bad to worse.



Science fiction has always been a repository for our hopes and fears. It allows us to explore the potential and dangers of the world we live in and see ourselves from a different vantage point by transplanting the issues of today into the world of tomorrow. It is the most creative of cinematic genres since the opportunities for plot are limitless. As we change, so our reflection changes as does the world of science fiction. I hope this personal journey through a century of science fiction has given you some food for thought, brought back some memories and encouraged you to watch just some of the films discussed. Of course it is not definitive, there are thousands of science fiction films and these are just a small selection, I am sure if you were writing this article you would choose many different examples. That is the joy of science fiction, it is a genre big enough to stimulate, intrigue and entertain a diverse and varied audience.





# STAR TREK

*LEGENDS OF THE FINAL FRONTIER*

*GO BOLDLY ....*

When the Star Trek TV series was finally (?) cancelled in 1969 Gene Roddenberry, its creator, lobbied Paramount to make a film based on the series. With the experience of the TV series behind them Paramount knew SF would sell. Instead of Star Trek, though, they tried Close Encounters of the Third Kind. It became a hit but really had nowhere to go once it was over. Plans had been made and preliminary scripts written for a new Star Trek: Phase II TV series, but they felt that a movie would be more successful. The TV script was rewritten as a film script and in 1978 they announced the new film would be made by Robert Wise. This led to a series of successful films that are presented in this magnificent boxed set. Some of the films are now thirty years old but they have remastered well. It might be appropriate, though, to refresh our memories of the individual films.



## Star Trek: The Motion Picture (1979)

With a ten-year gap between the TV series and the film Wise took the opportunity to put the Enterprise in orbital dock to be upgraded. This allowed a complete redesign of the old sets and Enterprise models. Most of the original cast were brought back, looking a little more mature now. New uniforms did a lot to hide the middle-age paunches and sags.

The plot was based on a strange, powerful cloud that was heading directly towards Earth. It had already destroyed three Klingon cruisers. The only Federation ship that could intercept it



in time was the Enterprise. Kirk (now Admiral Kirk) had himself transferred to command the Enterprise one last time, over the objections of its Captain Decker. They intercepted the strange cloud and it turned out to be an intelligent vessel named V'ger. Its purpose was to find its creator on Earth so it could complete its mission. The mystery of its origin was finally solved when it was realised that V'ger was actually the little exploration craft Voyager 6 that had left the solar system three hundred years before, headed out into space. It had disappeared into a black hole and was believed lost. Now here it was, rebuilt by some alien machine civilisation and made immensely more powerful and self-aware so it could complete its mission – to find out as much as possible about the galaxy and return to Earth. When its mission was complete it faced the problem of “what next?” It needed a new focus but first it had to find its creator, which it assumed was another powerful machine. It thought the Enterprise could be that Creator.

The Enterprise crew faced the problem of convincing V'ger that the humans “infesting” the Enterprise were actually its creators and should not be destroyed. If they failed to convince it the Earth would be sterilised as well. Captain Decker gave himself to the machine so it could merge with its “creator” and this satisfied V'ger.



The story has a poignant touch. At the time the Voyager probes sent vast amounts of information back about the planets of our solar system. For such tiny pieces of technology their contribution to science was way beyond their cost. Voyager 6 was the most effective. At the end of its passage past most of the planets, it was abandoned to hurtle off into space. It seemed a sad end for such an important little craft.

The film was received with mixed feelings. There were many comments that there were too many special effects and not enough action. The plot was felt to be too brief. Harold Michelson's set designs were said to be less than modern. The nitpicking didn't matter and the film was a success anyway. The budget was originally set at fifteen million dollars but that didn't go far with the bridge set alone costing over \$200,000. The final cost was more like forty six million, but Paramount made over \$139 million worldwide and was satisfied.

I loved the film. The new Enterprise, subject of a slow and spectacular fly-past at the beginning, was simply stunning. There was enough of the old Enterprise layout to make it look familiar in its new style. Although the actors had their problems rekindling the old magic, the film still worked well. The somewhat mystical period with V'ger was engaging and the final revelation of its origins was satisfying. The film would still hold its own against the best CGI effects.

### Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan (1982)

Khan Singh (Ricardo Montalban) is a genetically modified human. His faction lost out in the Eugenics War many years earlier and the then Captain Kirk marooned him on a planet in the Ceti Alpha system. At that time it was a decent planet but when one of the other planets in the system exploded it was knocked out of orbit. It is now a barren windswept hellhole populated only by Khan and his few survivors. They have



been forgotten by the rest of humanity. The starship Reliant detects signs of life while surveying planets in the area and Commander Chekov and Captain Terril beam down to take a look. They are searching for a lifeless planet to test a Genesis Device, a torpedo that can terraform a planet at a wildly accelerated rate. It was designed by an old girlfriend of Kirk's.

Chekov and Terril are captured by Khan and his "supermen" who take over both the Reliant and the Genesis space station. Then Khan sets about plotting his revenge against Kirk. Kirk is now in charge of training at Starfleet Academy and he is having a mid-life crisis. He would rather be in space. The Enterprise, under Spock's command and with Kirk on board, is on a training mission until called in to help the Reliant.

A group of trainees in an aging ship must beat a revolutionary in a modern warship. In the end the battle comes down to Khan's ruthlessness versus Kirk's cunning. Spock gives his life to save his ship and his crew. Kirk discovers that he has a son. In the test showings the audience reaction to Spock's death was highly adverse, so the ending was rewritten in such a way that he could be revived later if necessary.

Star Trek The Motion Picture was criticised for its lack of action but there can be no such criticism for this film. The beautifully filmed space battles are all that a Trekkie could want. Gene Roddenberry, the series creator, got the blame for the defects of the first film and was removed from production of Wrath of Khan. He did, however, work on the script. There was minor criticism of lacklustre acting but overall the film was a commercial success.

There was some cost-cutting with props being reused from the earlier film and more extensive use of CGI rather than models. The film took \$97 million overall and encouraged Paramount to keep going with the films.

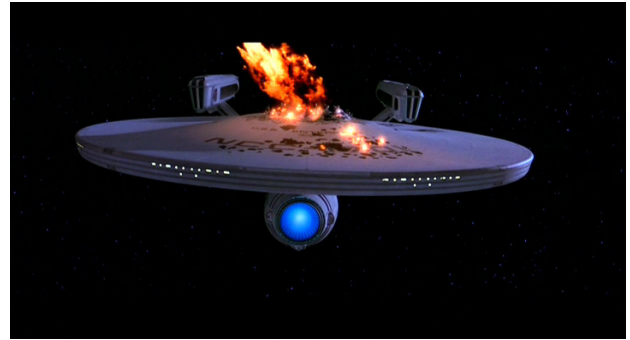




### Star Trek III: The Search for Spock (1984)

This was a sequel to *Wrath of Khan*. Leonard Nimoy had only made *Wrath of Khan* on condition that it was to be his last Star Trek film. Paramount lured him back for another film by giving him the job of producer as well. It seems to have worked and Nimoy turned into a confident able director. The producer was Harve Bennet and he also wrote the script. It appears that Gene Roddenberry and Robert Wise had still not been forgiven for the expensive if profitable *Star Trek: The Movie*. The film opened in 1984 and broke box office records, even surpassing *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. In spite of the promising start the film made only \$87 million worldwide, so perhaps Roddenberry was vindicated. Again the special effects were a major cost. CGI was now extensively used, courtesy of Industrial Light and Magic, and the sequences are spectacular.

After their battle off the Genesis planet the *Enterprise* has limped home to Earth, seriously damaged. There Kirk receives two pieces of bad news. He will not be allowed to return to retrieve Spock's body, as the planet is now the center of a diplomatic row with the Klingons. They see the Genesis device as a planet-busting weapon. The second piece of news is that the *Enterprise* will be decommissioned, not repaired. It is old technology. The crew will be spread amongst Starfleet where their expertise is needed to train new crews. There will, of course, be promotions and medals handed out. Spock's father, Sarek, tells Kirk that a Vulcan can transfer his mind to another person if he knows death is near. Dr McCoy has been suffering mental instability and flashbacks, and they realise that he has received Spock's personality. Kirk decides to steal the *Enterprise* and take it on one last mission to recover Spock's body and take it and McCoy back to the Vulcan home planet. The Vulcans may be able to repair Spock's body and return his memories to him. Out of loyalty to Spock the officers decide to join Kirk in a mission that will mean the end of their careers.

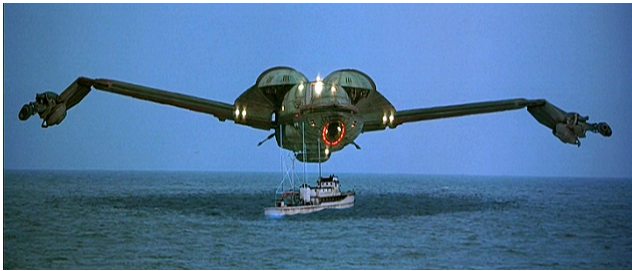


The planet is being monitored by Kirk's son and a Vulcan girl Saavik. They detect a lifeform on the planet and beam down from the science vessel *Grissom* to investigate. The runaway evolution on the planet has rejuvenated Spock from the cells in his body and he has regrown into a youth. His mind, though, is empty. The *Grissom* is destroyed by a Klingon ship employing a new "cloaking" device, and the three people on the planet are taken prisoner. The Klingon commander wants the Genesis device because of its potential as a weapon. The planet is showing this potential as it is already becoming unstable. When the *Enterprise* is attacked by the Klingons Kirk must sacrifice it and get the crew down to the planet. In the process he manages to kill most of the Klingons and take over their ship with the valuable cloaking technology. More importantly he can take the young Spock, still growing rapidly and now near to his age when he died, back to Vulcan. The Vulcans restore Spock's memories to his new body.

Although the fans were happy that Spock had been resurrected there was a feeling of sadness and anger that the trusty *Enterprise* had finally met its end. There was also a certain discomfort that Spock's resurrection was getting rather close to the resurrection of Jesus and the whole story had developed a religious feel. Personally I felt that the scenes of Spock's restoration were over the top and silly. A Vulcan High Priestess whose speech is full of "Thee" and "Thou" and "Thy"? A Chinese gong-banger? It was a minor disappointment in what is otherwise another great Star Trek film.

### Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home (1986)

The team of Harve Bennet as producer and Leonard Nimoy as director seems to have worked well. William Shatner was reluctant to return without a higher wage, but he was satisfied with a small increase and a promise that he could direct the next film. By now Paramount had decided to keep the series of films going –



the fans were happy, the money was rolling in – what else could they do?

Still exiled on Vulcan, the crew members decide to return to Earth and take their punishment for stealing and losing the Enterprise. Spock is recovering but is now starting to learn some of the oddities of people with emotions – humans. Unknown to them Earth is being ravaged by a huge cylindrical space vessel that is sending out a signal so powerful it is destroying much of Earth's technology. When they get within range Spock identifies the signal as whale song. Whales were hunted to extinction on Earth hundreds of years ago. No one understood the whales' song language so they cannot reply to the space vessel. The only way appears to be to go back in the past and kidnap some whales. The clash of a later technology with that of 1986 is played lightly. It is not exactly laughable, given the timely ecological message involved, but there are many moments where a flash of humour is allowed through.

Dr Gillian Taylor at the San Francisco Cetacean Institute is a whale researcher. She has two whales at the Institute to which she has become quite attached. They are now due for release back into the wild where they will almost certainly be taken by whalers. One is a pregnant female. Rather than hunt more wild whales Kirk decides he will kidnap these two, as taking them back to the twenty third century seems the best way to ensure their survival. Dr Taylor gets onto the ship as well and is taken along with her beloved whales. Their stolen Klingon ship with its valuable cloaking device crashes into San Francisco bay, the whales are released and respond

to the alien's signals, the aliens return to space and all is well.

Now the crew must face their court martial. Although he wasn't charged, Spock stands alongside his friends. Because of the "mitigating circumstances" the crew is let off, but someone must be punished. Kirk is demoted to Captain and given a ship to command - the new Enterprise.

The Voyage Home was something of a budget film. Most of the sets were recycled from earlier films and without space battles to film the CGI could be kept to a minimum. It was set in 1986 so there are many outside shots, since there was no need to build period sets. It worked out well. For a cost of \$27 million the film grossed \$109 million. The film is dedicated to the men and women who lost their lives in the space shuttle Challenger disaster.

### Star Trek V: The Final Frontier (1989)

During the first cruise of the new Enterprise the crew finds so many faults that they return to the spacedock for urgent repairs. They are enjoying some shore leave when they are recalled. Someone has kidnapped three ambassadors on Nimbus III and Kirk is the only one with diplomatic experience who may be able to handle the problem.

The planet has been taken over by Sybok, a charismatic Vulcan who has the power to control peoples' minds. He also controls the minds of the Earth, Klingon and Romulan ambassadors. He takes over the Enterprise crew and tells Kirk his intention is to fly beyond the Great Barrier to a planet he believes is hidden at the centre of the galaxy. There he will find God. Sybok is Spock's brother. He controls people by bringing their deepest fears to the surface and helping them to confront those fears. Kirk, Spock and McCoy cannot be controlled. Kirk needs his fears to grow in wisdom and experience as a person – it is what has made him a good commander.







Spock's greatest fear was the rejection he felt as a half breed little boy on Vulcan, but he has found a new home and respect in Starfleet. His early rejection no longer worries him. McCoy's fear is the memory of having to let his father die of old age when he could have kept the old man alive a little longer. When this fear is recalled by Sybok McCoy decides that even with his current advanced medical training he would still have let his father die with dignity. With the crew of his ship under the control of Sybok, Kirk has no choice but to go through the barrier. He is followed by a prowling Klingon ship whose captain, Klaa, wants to make a name for himself by destroying Kirk and the Enterprise.

Considering that every ship and probe sent into the barrier has never been heard of again, they pass through it remarkably easily and there, sure enough, is a desert planet. On the planet they meet the Supreme Being. He turns out not to be God as Sybok believed but an alien of tremendous power who has been imprisoned there. The alien wants to take over the Enterprise and use it to spread his control though the galaxy. Sybok is stunned that his God has turned out to be a greedy, savage creature. He tries to join his powerful mind to the alien's and in the ensuing battle of wills the others try to escape. The alien wins, however, and is about to kill Kirk when the Klingon ship appears and uses its powerful weapons to kill the alien. The Klingon ambassador, an old naval man himself, has overridden the younger Klingon Captain Klaa and ordered him to help Kirk. With a new detente forming with the Klingons, the crew are free to return to their shore leave so we have the painful sight of Spock singing "Row row row your boat" in a campfire singalong.

Shatner's direction was well received by the other actors. They gave excellent performances in what was otherwise a rather drawn-out plot. Shatner had been constantly fighting middle-aged weight gain but made a major effort to get himself into shape for the film. It paid off and he



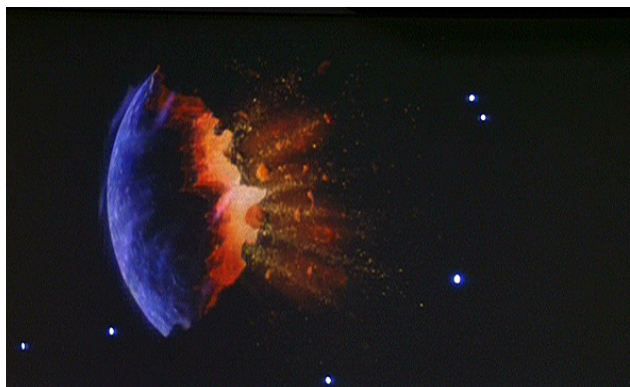
felt better and was more active than in previous films. Some of the themes of the film were controversial. Sybok looked suspiciously like a modern-day televangelist. The euthanasia issue is still controversial, but in spite of this the film continued to "Go Boldly ...."

As before some humour was written in to lighten the intense plot. This did not please all the actors but it stayed in anyway. Shots like the space dock were again recycled from earlier films, but new CGI scenes were done by another company. Industrial Light and Magic was simply too expensive. Unfortunately the effects were rather poor compared to ILM's superior work. One critic quite reasonably described their penetration of the barrier as "To pass through an impenetrable (Ha!) swirl of what appears to be cosmic Windex". The critics and fans generally didn't like the film very much. There were comments about its lack of action and vague, drawn out plot, and the apparent betrayal by the crew drew some criticism. My personal gripe is why do all planets in the galaxy apparently have to be deserts? They all look the same after a while.

The film made \$70 million against a cost of \$27 million, so it was still financially successful – just not as good as hoped for. The series would probably have ended here but there was a major event coming up – the series' twenty fifth anniversary.

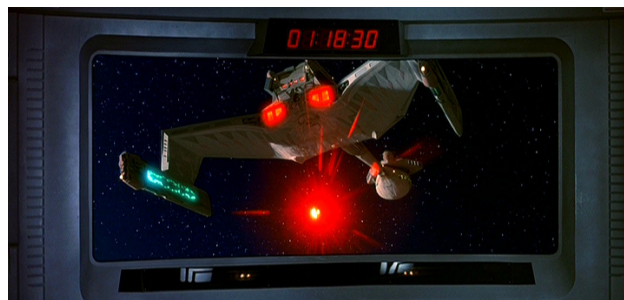
### **Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country (1991)**

This film echoes the glasnost era of politics. The Klingons' main power-producing planet has exploded and a team led by Spock estimates that their atmosphere will become toxic within fifty years. Due to their massive military expenditure the Klingons don't have the resources to clean up their planet and they must now



throw themselves on the mercy of the other planetary groups. It will mean the end of the Klingon and Earth navies as their very purpose is to keep each other in check. Not everyone is in favour of dismantling the navy, including Captain Kirk. He simply doesn't trust the Klingons. The feeling is mutual. The "undiscovered country" is Peace and it looks to be as far away as ever. The Enterprise is seconded to pick up the Klingon ambassador to bring him to a peace conference. While the two ships are adjacent the Enterprise appears to fire on the Klingon ship. The ambassador is killed. Kirk and McCoy are arrested for his murder by the Klingons and sentenced to a prison planet for the rest of their lives. It is up to Spock to work out what really happened, rescue his shipmates, and deal with the rogue Klingons who have set up the assassination.

Due to the disappointing financial outcome of the previous film Paramount should have spent a little more money on this one, but they again opted to cut the budget. There were the usual recycled sets and recycled film clips. A minimum number of new effects was added by Industrial Light and Magic and they definitely improved the look of the film. The intelligent plot by Nicholas Mayer and Denny Martin Flinn helped too. They kept some of the wisecracking that made the crew human and this offset the darker mood of the rest of the film. Fan and critic reaction was mixed but the final gross of \$96 million worldwide showed that overall the fans liked it. Two sad notes were present, though. The first was that this was the last time that all



the original crew members appeared in a film together. The second was the death of Gene Roddenberry just before the film's release. It was dedicated to his memory.

In 1987 the TV series was revived with a new Captain, ship and crew as Star Trek: The Next Generation. The new series allowed the story-line to develop in new directions. One was the introduction of a new enemy, the half-man, half-machine collective intelligence known as the Borg. While the new series was introducing and consolidating its new characters and concepts, the transition in the string of films was handled smoothly in the next movie.

### Star Trek VII: Generations (1994)

This film marked the end of the original Enterprise crew. Kirk, McCoy, and Chekov are guests on the first voyage of the new Enterprise B. While trying to rescue survivors from two ships destroyed by a mysterious energy ribbon Kirk is killed, missing in action.

Seventy eight years later a new Enterprise, the D model under the command of Jacques-Luc Picard, is fighting a deranged scientist named Soran who wants to become part of the "energy ribbon" that is once again passing through this part of the galaxy. To do this he will detonate a bomb that will explode the sun of the Amargosa system. This will throw the ribbon off course so it hits the third planet where he is waiting for it. An alien named Guinan (Whoopi Goldberg) has explained to Picard that the energy ribbon is a temporal trap that can capture people and their memories. It keeps its captives in a state of







bliss forever. She and Soran are two of the few people who have ever been removed from the ribbon. It is this emotional bliss that Soran wants to return to, although destroying the Amargosan sun will kill over 230 million people on its planets. Soran's plan succeeds, the ribbon hits the planet and Picard finds himself trapped in the ribbon with the family he always wanted but never had. His sense of duty outweighs his pleasure, especially when Guinan appears to him and tells him that there is one man who can help him – James T Kirk, who is himself trapped in the ribbon. If they refuse to stay trapped they can be expelled to a time and place of their choosing. They choose a time just before Soran fires his bomb into the sun. Soran is beaten but Kirk is killed once again during the fight. The Enterprise is badly damaged and crash lands on the planet in one of the most spectacular scenes in the series of films.

This film is one that had to be made to give some sort of finality to the old crew. Nimoy no longer wished to act, DeForest Kelly was too ill to get insurance to do the films, and even William Shatner and Montgomery Scott were showing their age in spite of good makeup. Generations serves as a way to introduce a new ship and a new crew. There is one element of continuity – Sulu's daughter is the new ship's Ensign ("Where did he find the time?" muses Kirk).

A new director, David Carson, made a good job of the film despite having no prior feature film experience. Reaction to the film was mixed. It was generally felt to be adequate if a little over-padded, but it made \$118 million against a \$35 million budget so most fans were satisfied. It was certainly enough to keep the franchise alive



for a little longer. That's not bad for a TV series that first expired in 1969.

### Star Trek: First Contact (1996)

In the two years since the last film a lot had happened. The TV series had Captain Picard captured by the Borg and converted to one of them, then had him saved and converted back. Picard was now regarded with a certain suspicion by Starfleet.

Time travel plays a big part in this film. In the past the first Earth warp-drive spaceship was launched by a scientist named Zefram Cochrane. It was converted from an old ICBM. In its brief voyage it was noticed by another starship passing through the solar system and Earth, since it now had space travel, was invited to join the Federation. This marked the end of wars on Earth as the nations combined to catch up with other spacefaring nations. Cochrane was regarded in the history books as a hero. The Borg has changed history by making sure Cochrane's flight did not occur and in the current day Earth is a Borg colony. The only way things can be put right is for the Enterprise to go back in time and make sure the flight occurs as history recorded it. There are a few surprises in store. Cochrane is not the heroic pioneering scientist of the history books but a drunken old man who is not sure he is game to ride his creation into space.

The Borg have infiltrated the Enterprise, so the crew must help Cochrane while fighting the Borg on their own ship. Picard must confront





his own demons and decide if his emotions about the Borg are endangering his ship and crew. Rick Berman, Brannon Braga and Ronald Moore wrote a story that is intelligent and allows full use of the CGI that the fans loved about the Borg are endangering his ship and crew. Rick Berman, Brannon Braga and Ronald Moore wrote a story that is intelligent and allows full use of the CGI that the fans loved.

It also fills in some of those little gaps that have been left as the Star Trek series grew – how did Warp Drive come about? How did man meet other races? Fans liked it and the film took \$146 million worldwide.

### Star Trek IX: Insurrection (1998)

Once again William Frakes as director and Rick Berman and Michael Piller as writers produced a fine drama. In my opinion this was one of the best stories in the series as it gave the actors a wider range of emotions to play and introduced plot elements that were the opposite of what we had come to expect. In fact it brought the characters' loyalty to Starfleet into question.

The story opens on a planet in an area of space called "the Briar Patch" after the mix of random and rogue radiations, clouds of explosive gas



and other hazards. On a single planet in the Briar Patch live the Ba'ku, six hundred refugees from a civil war on another planet. They were once spacefaring people but opted for a simpler quieter life. Their young people could not accept this and the Ba'ku were driven from their home. They have lived in the Briar Patch for hundreds of years and have a stuck to their simple non-technological lifestyle. They are being observed by a cloaked observation group including Data from the Enterprise, Starfleet scientists and a group of Starfleet allies, the Son'a. Data appears to suffer a breakdown and destroys the cloaking mechanism, bringing the observation post into view of the Ba'ku. A Son'a ship carrying an aging commander and elderly Starfleet admiral Dougherty pursue Data but the Enterprise arrives off the planet and takes him into custody first.

Rather than hand over Data and resume their station, Picard investigates why Data acted as he did. What he finds concerns him. The rogue radiation of the Briar Patch is filtered by the planet's rings into a benign radiation that can prolong life and reverse aging. Most of the Ba'ku are hundreds of years old although appearing to be in their thirties. Stripping away the radioactive particles will make the planet uninhabitable.

The son'a want to harvest the radioactive particles to prolong their own lives. Starfleet appears to have given in to the powerful Son'a in direct violation of their Prime Directive - no Starfleet expedition may interfere with the natu-







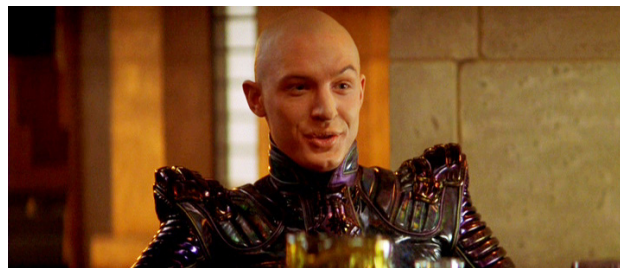
ral development of other civilizations. Many of the Starfleet hierarchy like Dougherty would like the treatment as well so they have found a loophole. The Ba'ku are not native to the planet so evicting them is OK. The Son'a have a spaceship standing by. One night they will kidnap the Ba'ku and ship them off-planet. This will leave the planet empty for them to take over.

Picard is stunned when he learns that Starfleet will cooperate in such a mass eviction. History has taught him that relocated populations rarely survive the experience. He removes his uniform, orders the Enterprise back into space to transmit the details back to Starfleet and Earth, and joins the Ba'ku on the planet to resist the landing of the Son'a. The Son'a attack the Enterprise with Dougherty's consent, and the planet as well. They forcibly beam up as many Ba'ku as they can capture. Picard is taken along with the Ba'ku. Starfleet admiral Dougherty sees what he has done and has an attack of conscience. He attempts his own rebellion but is killed. Finally it is up to one of the Son'a to rebel against his commander and take up the cause of Picard and the Ba'ku. He helps Picard escape and take over the Son'a ship. The commander of the Son'a is killed in the fighting.

The Enterprise medical team have made an interesting discovery. The DNA of the Ba'ku and Son'a is the same. The Son'a are the kids who took over their home planet hundreds of years ago.

The two groups are finally reconciled, Starfleet is put in its place and reminded of its duty, and the insurrection is over. Picard has formed a love interest with one of the three-hundred-year-old Ba'ku women, and promises to spend his next shore leave with her. As he says, he has always preferred older women. Bloody sailors. They're all the same.

Industrial Light and Magic was working on Star Wars at the time so the CGI went to Blue Sky Studios and Santa Barbara Studios. Most effects in the film were now CGI, with very little



model work. They did a very credible job and the effects are as good as any seen up to this point. The effects pushed the budget to \$58 million.

Critics were mixed in their reaction, many saying that the film was just an enlarged episode of the TV show, but the fans voted with their wallets. It took \$112 million worldwide. This fell a little short of the gross of *First Contact*, but it was enough to make the film a success.

### Star Trek X: Nemesis (2002)

Written by John Logan and directed by Stuart Baird, this film is the biggest disappointment in the set. It simply has too many budget shortcuts, clichés and very cheap thrills.

For centuries the people of Remus have been slave workers of the planet Romulus. Now they have their independence under a new leader, Shinzon. He plans to unite Romulus and Remus but the Romulan Council isn't having that. With the help of dissatisfied generals of the Romulan space force he has the Council assassinated and takes control of both planets.

Picard and the Enterprise are passing through the area and stop at a nearby planet to investigate strange "positronic" emissions. These are coming from a dismantled android who looks like a clone of Data. The parts are taken on board and reconstructed. The android is a simple one who calls himself B4. He is taken to be a Data prototype. The Enterprise is called to meet the new Romulan leader, Shinzon, supposedly to negotiate a peace treaty. with the Federation. He really has other plans.





Shinzon is a human clone of Picard.

He believes that he is as good a military leader as Picard and has inherited all Picard's strengths. He cannot accept that Picard in his longer lifetime has developed differently to Shinzon because of his wider range of experience. Shinzon plans to show his power by destroying Earth then taking over the Federation by using a new weapon he has developed.

First, though, his creators have set a "self-destruct" in their clone. Shinzon is dying and only a complete blood transfusion from a DNA-compatible donor (that's Picard) can save him. He can take over the Enterprise courtesy of the information taken from her computers by the Data clone but Picard resists. It's the classic battle between the enthusiasm of youth versus the cunning of age. The usual battle ensues and once again the galaxy is made safe for humanity.

Now the bad news. Some of the titling letters are back to front. This may be supposed to look Roman or something but it is silly and a poor start to the film. On the planet where the Data clone is discovered (yes, another desert planet) there is a drawn-out cheap-thrills dune buggy chase that detracts from the storyline. The Remans are depicted as having vampire-like features, right down to the fangs.

Why they look like this is not explained, but it looks tacky. Nor is it explained why they would follow a humanoid leader and revolt against their Romulan masters. Or why the Romulan space forces would follow him either. Or how the Reman warship is a superior technology to



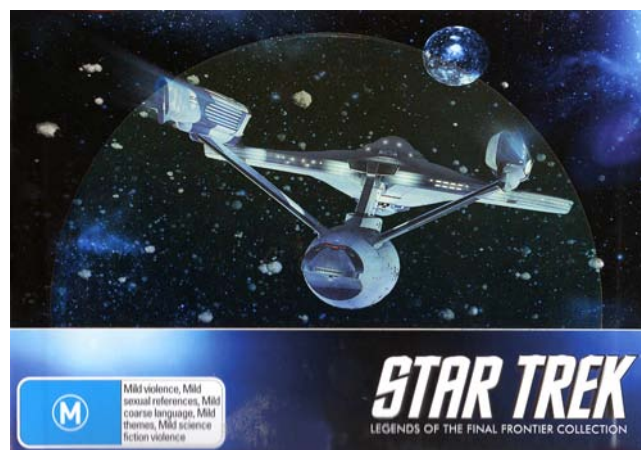
that of the Romulans, despite their being slaves until recently.

On the positive side many of the action sequences are brilliantly done in CGI. The sequence of the Enterprise ramming Shinzon's Reman warship is every bit as good as the crash landing on the planet in *Star Trek VII: Generations*. It's a pity the rest of the film wasn't as good as this, but once again Paramount's cost-cutting is evident.

Each DVD has its own extras, usually interviews or "The Making Of ..." style of thing. The set also includes two Extras DVDs that include a brilliant section on the evolution of the Enterprise, the villains of the series, and even a chart of the frontier areas. The second DVD is a "talking heads" featurette with five of the series' actors brought together to relive their memories and experiences.

The boxed set is a spectacular reminder of one of the greatest SF shows of all time.

Each film has been well restored and has many relevant bonus features. There is enough here to keep the most dedicated Trekkie happy for days. I'm not that dedicated, but I still found it fascinating to go back through the films and relive the memories. The set is a tribute to Gene Roddenberry's original idea.





**2012 Supernova**  
(2009)  
SciFi  
The Asylum  
Peacock Films  
R4 DVD

Two hundred years ago a star in a neighboring part of the galaxy went supernova and the shock wave is now approaching Earth. Scientists are aware it is coming and an international group has been formed to handle the crisis.

Their proposal is to use all the world's nuclear warheads to set up a nuclear "shield" just in front of the wave. This should theoretically block the electromagnetic part of the wave that will otherwise strike the earth and leave it radioactive and uninhabitable.

The United States, Russia and the Peoples Republic of China are all cooperating to achieve this. Or are they? Someone is leaking information out of the military base and terrorists have attacked Dr Kelvin, the American scientist, and his family. They may be active inside the base as well.

The wave is going to reach the Earth faster than their predictions showed and they may not be able to get enough warheads into space to do the job. Already the first effects are being felt on Earth – earthquakes, savage electrical storms and meteor showers of supernova debris.

Kelvin's wife and daughter are trapped somewhere in the desert and are trying to find their way to the military base. Kelvin must go up to the orbiting space station to control the launch of the warheads since the communications sys-



tems on Earth are collapsing.

The film has two main themes in it. There is the End Of Civilization As We Know It approach, which can only be resolved by American Science. More interesting is the Survival Against The Odds theme involving Kelvin's family. The script is a little light but these two elements serve to keep the story rolling and the tension high.

The film has a slight budget look about it with recycled shots of rocket launches and even the Columbia space shuttle explosion. There are some shots that I am sure I have seen in other SF films.

There is a lot of quite effective new CGI work added, though, and it makes up for the minor defects. The scenes of the weird weather events are particularly well done. Stunts are well executed and spectacular.

Don't expect another Star Wars, but it's a decent SF film with some high tension and good acting. It has its rough moments but overall it's worth watching.



**Armageddon (1998)  
R4 DVD  
Walt Disney Studios**

Looking at classic science fiction films Armageddon is a surprisingly successful comet disaster film from 1998.

Harry Stamper is played by Bruce Willis with a team of top actors including rebellious A. J. (Ben Affleck); gambler Chick (Will Patton); sex-addict Rockhound (Steve Buscemi); Bear (Michael Duncan) and larger than life Max (Ken Hudson Campbell), Liv Taylor plays Stamper's daughter and A.J.'s love interest. She, of course, adds a sweet tone to the whole film which becomes more than a little saccharine.

Armageddon mixes together top notch special effects, hokey American patriotism, lots of sentimentality (including the mandatory love interest and a reuniting of separated father, wife and child) and way too much testosterone.

It is a film which dated before its time due to 9/11, while disaster films were very popular in the Nineties when real disaster struck in the forms of terrorism images of New York being hit by a comet become rather difficult to stomach for many.

There are a lot of underlying motifs in Armageddon, the most obvious is the use of Biblical and religious imagery; the film is called Armageddon and even the President talks of Biblical prophecy. There is also a strangely ambiguous attitude towards science and technology.



NASA is depicted as bungling and out of touch and while their rocket may get the team into space, it is real blue collar workers who dig the hole and save the day.

The theme of the "great American dream" is emphasized especially with the mining team. Here are average, blue collar men who have drinking, drug and gambling issues but when called on are able to literally "save the world".

After a while the Americanism of the film does begin to grate, especially with the way that sentimental images of family and churches are all used to bolster the great success of the "average man as hero".

If you can overlook these overused images and try to enjoy the film as a work of science fiction it is actually a damn good film which keeps you interested for the whole running time of 2 ½ hours.

The space shuttle Atlantis is destroyed by a meteor shower and in short order New York City comes under attack, not from weapons but from the same shower that destroyed the shuttle. Since NASA is underfunded, it has not seen





that a large asteroid, the size of Texas is going to hit in earth in a very short time.

As NASA debates what can be done they come up with a novel solution. Since an atomic weapon placed on the surface will not deflect the asteroid, they will send a team to drill 800 feet into the surface and place an atomic device into the hole, blowing it from the inside.

Everyone is not convinced and a secret secondary plan is put into place to set off the device remotely if the drilling fails.

A team of rowdy oil drillers led by Harry Stamper (Bruce Willis) is chosen to undertake the task. At first Harry is asked to lead a NASA team but he refuses as he does not trust anyone but his own team of talented but wayward misfits. Soon they are on the way into space but not before medical tests, training and an unfortunate night on the town. The team is divided into two and they rocket into space with NASA pilots and technical support.

Landing on the asteroid disaster strikes and the second team seems lost. Confrontations occur when the military attempts to pre-emptively set off the bomb but finally the hole is drilled, but not without great cost.

As many have noticed this is film which while having some environmental message i.e. the importance of NASA and the danger of comets, is essentially a very macho experience. Bruce Willis as Stamper is the super male, shooting at A.J for loving his daughter, shooting golf balls at Greenpeace and degrading NASA for their lack of skills. In many ways Stamper is the ultimate phallic image, with his huge drill he can drive into the greatest threat the earth has even seen and save the day.

A triumph for the average male transformed from an uneducated oil driller into a hero. It is also to be noted that it is an American male who saves the day, while a Russian is on board as

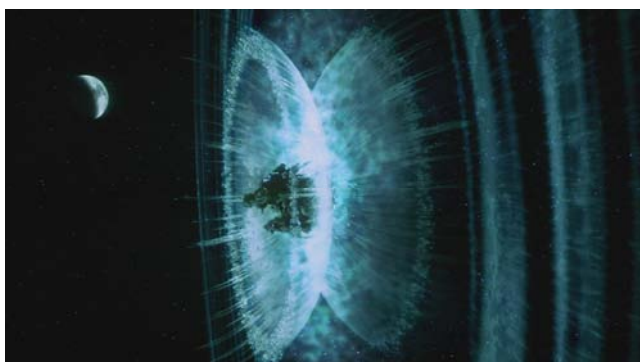


well (only by accident when the space station is blown up) he is shown as a buffoon. No other country, not even the Europeans, can get anyone into space to save the world except the heroic Americans.

While there is certainly way too much testosterone, sugar and gloss, there is also an amazing array of superb special effects. Even though this was made in 1998, it stands the test of time pretty well and looks great. The world on the asteroid does remind me of 1950's sci fi but it looks realistic enough that it works and the meteor showers hitting New York, India and Paris are very well done.

There are some scenes which are just plain ridiculous; the space vehicle using the difference in gravity to fly over an asteroid version of the Grand Canyon stretches credibility to breaking point. But then drilling on an asteroid after 12 days training to save mankind does much the same; you need to suspend critical functions to enjoy this film.

Armageddon is a strange film which a lot of viewers had an instant reaction to; it was loved and hated in nearly equal amounts. It really depends on how you wish to view the film, if you accept it as a science fiction fantasy and ignore some of the more hokey even preposterous content then it is an enjoyable romp into space. For better or worse it does have a place in any sci fi lovers film library.



### Astro Boy (2009) Summit Entertainment Cinema Release

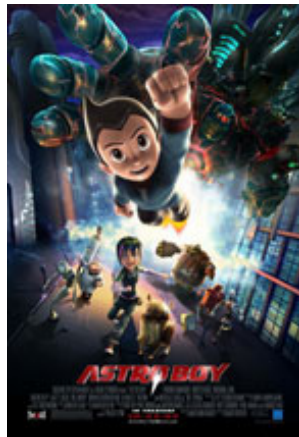
Astro Boy is a figure which lives on in the memories of millions, he is a child robot much loved and celebrated in many TV series. Trying to bring him into the 21st century and satisfy everyone is a very hard ask. The look of *Astro Boy* is marvellous; it certainly combines the look and feel of the original series while bringing it up to date. The most difficult thing about the film is exactly who it is aimed at. Much of the action is really a bit beyond young kids, yet the twee nature of much of the dialogue and character development won't wash with early teens.

The political and social message of the film lack subtly and the characters are much the same. When you consider just some of the names in the film - Nicolas Cage, Samuel L. Jackson, Charlize Theron, Donald Sutherland, Nathan Lane and Matt Lucas I am surprised it doesn't have a stronger plot and character development.

It is a film which really does not know what it is; it seems to be trying to be all things to all people and cross markets between a kids, teen and adults retro film and ultimately this creates a compromise which cannot be breached.

It is a film which is lots of fun and as an adult watching it with fun memories of *Astro Boy* as a child, it is a work of retro science fiction which pushes the nostalgia button and works well for that reason. For those not exposed to Astro Boy as a child I am not sure it will have the same success.

The film opens with a sort of *Blade Runner* view of the future, the planet has been ruined and a new world has been created off planet – in Astro Boy it is in the clouds. Metro City has been liter-



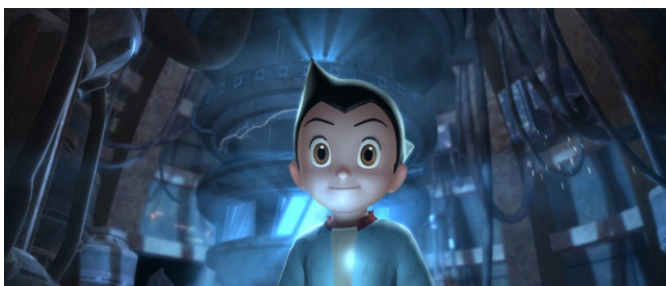
ally moved off-world and is a place where the rich live serviced by robots. At the same time there is a problem, as the robots reach their use by date they are thrown off Metro City onto the planet below which has literally become a giant rubbish dump. Outcasts live amongst the rubbish and in the decrepit buildings on the surface.

Dr. Tenma is the father of robotics in Metro City and has developed the many types of robots which run the city. Dr. Elephant has located a new power source from space, the problem is that to be utilized it had to be separated into two sorts of energy blue energy (good) and red energy (bad and unstable). President Stone, being a nasty political leader, wants to be re-elected at all costs and demands the scientists put the energy into a military "peace robot". When they disagree, he places the red energy into the new machine with disastrous results against their wishes; the robot runs amuck and Toby, Dr. Tenma's son is killed.

Tenma, overwhelmed with grief, uses Toby's DNA to somehow reprogram a blue energy robot which becomes "Astro Boy". Along the way we are treated to all sorts of sub plots about parent child relationships, the nature of acceptance, atomic warfare, environmentalism and discrimination. The problem is that many of these storylines are expressed in a very heavy handed manner and the constant simplistic good versus evil approach quickly becomes tiresome.

The big battle between The Red Energy Robot and Astro Boy is really quite amazing but would certainly terrify any younger kids watching the film. The animation cannot be faulted and it is lots of fun but again and again I felt that the film did not know what audience it was aimed at.

*Astro Boy* is a fun, action packed film and while successful, sadly is not as memorable as it could be and certainly does not give Astro Boy the adaptation he deserves.





**Atomic Age Vampire**  
**Echelon Films**  
**Singa Home**  
**Entertainment**  
**All Region NTSC**

*Atomic Age Vampire* was made in Italy in 1960 under the title *Sed-dok, l'erede di Satana*, it also became known as *Atom Age Dracula* and *Son Of Satan*.



It was released in 1963 in the United States as a black-and-white horror/science fiction film with influences ranging from a fear of radiation to vampire films and Dr.Jekyll and Mr.Hyde.

It was directed by Anton Giulio Majano (who in the US edition is listed as Richard McNamara), produced by Mario Fava (probably Mario Bava, though there is some debate on this) and stars Alberto Lupo. The original Italian film was adapted and shortened for the US market by about 18 minutes and dubbed. It has a rather impressive jazzy score by Armando Trovajoli.

Singer Jeanette Moreneau (Susanne Loret) is a successful singer and has a sailor lad for a lover, but when she refuses to give up her career for him he leaves in a huff. Following him in a hysterical rush (she spends a lot of time hysterical in this film), she crashes her car and is left badly disfigured. After all medical treatments fail she is convinced by Dr.Levin and his assistant to try an experimental treatment.

Dr. Levin spent some years studying the effects of radiation in post-Hiroshima Japan and along the way became exposed to radiation. He found his physical state constantly degenerating and need to develop a serum to keep himself alive.



He first develops "Derma 25" from the glands of Japanese refugees he kills but it is imperfect. He moves on to create Derma 28 which while regenerating tissue requires regular treatment. When he runs out of refugees to experiment on he uses Derma 25 to turn himself into a sort of "Mr.Hyde" figure whose bestial strength is used to capture and kill young women to gain access to their tissue and skin.

The vampire in the tale is, of course, Dr.Levin. The Japanese refugees describe a bestial killer who bites out sections of the throat, of course they see this as proof of vampirism while we know it is Dr.Levin collecting his glandular product. The vampire and Dr.Jekyll aspects of the tale are nice "post science" adaptations of traditional horror motifs.

Levin restores Jeanette beauty but becomes obsessed with her along the way. He kills his assistant when she gets in the way and keeps killing in the hope of keeping Jeanette beautiful and by his side. But her love lays elsewhere and she is just a "canary in a cage" and soon the police are on his trail and a clash between love, obsession and the law entails.

This is an unusual film with moody black and white cinematography, a jazzy score and a cross genre plot of sci fi and horror. The special effects are reasonable for the period with some nice work on the transformation of Levin into the beast.

It also has some nice club scenes, punch 'em moments and mad science lab set pieces. The atomic age paranoia adds to the interest of the film and gives it more of a 1950's feel, which adds to it's retro sci fi appeal.

**Webstore:** <http://www.singahe.com>

**Battle of the Worlds**  
 Echelon Studios  
 Singa Home  
 Entertainment  
 R1 DVD

*Pianeta degli uomini spenti, II* (*Battle of the Worlds*) is an Italian science-fiction film released in 1961. It was dubbed into English with very wordy dialogue and released in the United States in 1963. The DVD edition is a reasonable quality release with very clear sound. The picture, however, is what can be expected from a very old film which has not been restored. At the same time it is lovely to have such a strange and wonderful old sci-fi available on DVD at all.



The film was directed by Antonio Margheriti and starred Claude Rains, Bill Carter and Maya Brent. Claude Rains outdid himself as the mad old scientist. He is misanthropic and concerned only with “scientific knowledge” even if it is at the cost of the whole of humanity. He lives alone in his bunker like hothouse garden with his dog Gideon and obsesses about calculus only communicating with his staff through a thinly concerned veil of contempt.

The story opens a rather nice isolated island where Dr. Fred Steele (Umberto Orsini) and Eve Barnett (Maya Brent) are having a hot little romance. They both work at an astronomical station and have applied to transfer to the mainland where they aim to get married and start a new life together.

Things quickly change where observations by the team show that a rogue planet has entered the solar system and is on a supposed collision course with earth. When they confront Professor Benson he scoffs at their “mechanical” observations and advises that he has calculated that the planet will come within 95,000 miles of earth and they fly off into the sun. Other scientists find his style, manner and observations difficult to deal with but when the planet enters earth’s orbit they seem to be confirmed.

Benson, however, has found an anomaly, for some reason the planet now known as “The Outsider” for some quite bizarre and unexplainable reason should have moved off towards the sun and cannot find any scientific reason for



while it is now orbiting the earth. As spacecraft head towards the planet the truth becomes clear as UFO’s come out and attack and destroy them. It seems the planet is controlled by some sort of alien intelligence.

Benson is pleased since his calculus has proved reliable (he is a truly cantankerous old scientist) and he uses his position to negotiate with the governments of the earth to gain some role in the investigation of the planet. As “The Outsider” moves closer and closer to earth, the weather changes and disasters increase. Benson uses his knowledge to bring a UFO down and decode how it operates.

Soon the military have the knowledge to destroy the UFO’s and head for the planet itself. Under Benson’s control an expedition heads to the planet. They find that the race that once inhabited the planet is now dead and it is being operated by some sort of automated process. Of course Benson being unconcerned about earth and only desiring knowledge refuses to leave and so the team leave him in his delirium and at a safe distance destroy the planet, saving mankind.

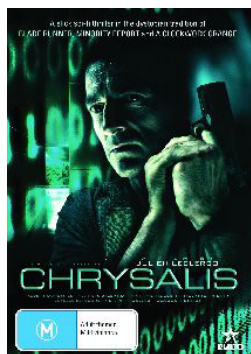
This is bewildering and bizarre film filled to the brim with talking. I do not think I have watched a film in which they yatter so much. Rains as Benson borders on the hysterical and much of the other actors while credible seem to have been dubbed with a vast amount of dialogue. The special effects are what one would expect from the time but the sheer madness of Raine’s performance makes this a stand out cult sci-fi title.

**Webstore:** <http://www.singahe.com>



**Chrysalis**  
**Rialto**  
**DV1**  
**R4 DVD**

Chrysalis is a haunting science fiction crime tale which resonates with the imagery of *Total Recall*, *Blade Runner* and even *A Clockwork Orange*. It has a strange visual presence, a moody score and beautiful cinematography.

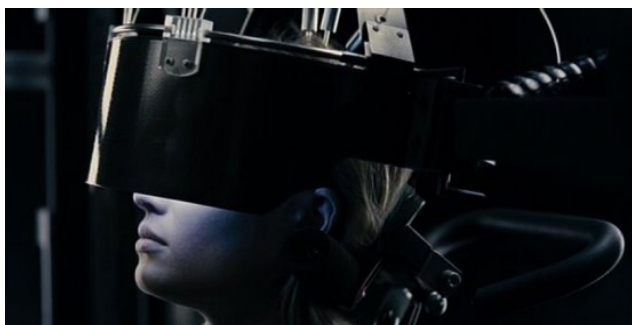


As the film opens, it is the year 2020 and a high tech surgeon and her daughter are in a horrific car accident. Obsessed with saving her daughters "consciousness", the surgeon makes a terrible deal to get access to a machine which can transfer memories from one body to another. However, this desperate act in a time of grief has far reaching consequences since the machine was stolen from the military and is now in the hands of the mob which demands a high price for its continued use.

Detective Hoffman is in hot pursuit of Nicolov, who has stolen the machine and seems responsible for many brutal murders. However, in a dramatic scene his partner is killed and he is shot. Damaged goods, he is still nevertheless let back on the case and assigned a new partner, Marie, to investigate the girl's murder. While he realizes her uncle is in "Euro Intelligence" he doesn't appreciate just how compromised his investigation really is.

As the story unfolds he uncovers the links between the clinic run by the grief stricken Professor Brügen, the mob and the connections with the military. If a machine can clean, replace or transfer memory imagine its dangers if it fell in the wrong hands.

Paris in 2020 is much like it is today but has a dark, cyberpunk sort of look, it is clearly a world dominated by technology. The cinematography



emphasizes this cold feel with lots of mirror shots, reflective surfaces and an emphasis on glass and steel.

While the acting is solid, Dupontel as Hoffman, the punch-first-ask-questions-later detective is especially impressive. The film on the whole, however, has little emotion. This is a bit of a problem when you consider that the major theme is the grief stricken doctor and her attempt to transform a kidnapped girl into her daughter.

The film has some extremely visceral action sequences including the violent confrontation between Marie, Dupontel and Nicolov's brother (who they believed is Nicolov) in the police station and the one-on-one between Nicolov and Dupontel in his bathroom. There are also some impressive and unexpected turns, especially the one involving Nicolov's twin brother.

At the same time the film does seem to regularly lag, there are long periods marked by mood and style which are punctuated by explosive action but not often enough to really keep you fully engaged.

Chrysalis marks an impressive debut for Leclercq which certainly stands out from more traditional sci fi fare and while it is not perfect; it is stylish, dark, moody and well worth watching.



**The Day The Earth  
Stood Still**  
20th Century Fox  
R4/R1 DVD



The Day The Earth Stood Still is considered a classic science fiction film but since it dates from 1951 it has a look that is very much a product of its time. Surprisingly, its message was anything but what would have expected for the period; it was a controversial film, anti war, environmentally aware and very pro the United Nations. It argued against limited tribal and national interests and for a global outlook, a significant sentiment for any period. At the time the filmmakers were accused of being communists and its peace message was viewed with much suspicion, today it is a celebrated work of cinema.

The remake has a lot going for it. Keanu Reeves as the detached and emotionless alien who comes to earth to evaluate mankind in a cold and rational way plays his role perfectly. The military might (and blind nationalism) of the United States is certainly on display. The CGI is marvellous, I am especially impressed with GORT. In the universal film his power is only hinted at; we are told he is some sort of galactic guardian and can destroy worlds to sustain the universal balance, but this is never on display. In the remake floating globes are created as reserves of earths creatures and then GORT transforms from a giant robot into a swarm of insects which literally eat everything they come across animal, mineral, vegetable, buildings, cars; the lot.



While these aspects of the story work well, the plot itself lacks substance; essentially Klaatu (Reeves) is convinced by seeing the love between a woman and her step son that mankind has a "positive side" and stops the destruction of the earth midstream. This soppy and sentimental tripe is really too much; sure in the original film there was a woman and child through which Klaatu gained experience of another side of the human race, but in the remake this is overemphasised and overplayed. Personally I cannot see how seeing a hug between a

woman and a kid in a war cemetery would show him the positive side of mankind. Indeed since it is a war cemetery (that's right, a war cemetery), it would remind him of the endless, senseless violence that marked mankind's time on this planet. Rather than suggesting that a hug makes all the difference, I would have thought the endless gravestones would have strengthened his resolve to wipe out the apes with weapons which threaten all the species which inhabit the planet they share it with.

Instead, the whole film seems focused on this woman and her kid and the greater picture ignored. Surely some time should have been spent on why Klaatu wanted to wipe the earth clean, but there is literally no discussion of this at all. Perhaps it is assumed we all know mankind is a pestilence which is destroying the planet, while I can't agree with this enough, it would have helped to present just some of the case in the film. All we get is a discussion between Klaatu and an "old alien" who has been on Earth for some years, where the older alien makes it clear mankind will not learn, but loves them anyway. Shucks! This is a film which should have been filled with ecological and environmental information, but there is none, all we have is a nebulous knowledge that Klaatu is here to save the earth from mankind, but nothing more.

Even the criticism of the military is limited, when Klaatu faces off against the spokesman for the US government and she says it is our world (i.e. the US governments) and he corrects her, it is a short minor scene. Surely this should have been expanded

with Klaatu discussing his mission, the significance of other species etc., but no, every opportunity for such extended dialog is lost.

In the end I complete this film with a certain knowing sadness. Once again Hollywood has taken a highly important film and turned it into fodder for the mass market. While the special effects have certainly evolved since 1951 and the look of the film is marvellous; its heart is missing and without a heart it simply goes through the motions of being a living work of entertainment but in reality is simply another flawed and meaningless remake. My advice, see the original !



### Deep Evil Peacock Films R4 DVD

*Deep Evil* is an intriguing science fiction film which combines a military black operation with a story about bio weapons. It seems a private sector lab working deep under the Alaskan mountains has been modifying alien DNA found on a meteor.



The experiments have led to the discovery of a new form of water based life which can survive in all climates and conditions and can mutant into a myriad of shapes and sizes as the needs require. During one of these experiments the water based creature transforms into a silvery spider and is able to breach the bio hazard suit of one of the doctors, causing his painful death and triggering a security shut down.

A motley crew of military types and scientists are sent to investigate but are shocked by what they find. It seems the key scientist has been working on a secret project for "Harrison", the code name for their military contact, on creating a new strain of the alien DNA. This new strain is intelligent, learns fast and while able to work as a liquid can recombine to create not only animal but humanoid forms.

It is a predator like no other and is now on the loose. If it comes in contact with a human, even in the form of a single drop of liquid, it is able to spread the infection quickly and destroy the human body from the inside out.

As it becomes clear that the creature has gained control of the lab, the team must set off a neutron bomb buried in the bowels of the complex. Fighting their way to the bomb, the team is killed, one by one, until one is left alone to neutralize the threat and ensure the creature never escapes.



While the name "*Deep Evil*" is not especially imaginative, this is actually a fairly successful film. From beginning to end it is suspenseful and the innovative concept of a "water based" creature allows the creation of constant tension.

The acting is reasonable and for a budget film the CGI is adequate. While in some places the special effects are a bit stretched (the spiders, for example), in others they are especially good, the humanoid water creatures are especially impressive and remind me of the monster from *The Creature from The Black Lagoon*!

This is a creative film and the director has clearly tried to make something a little different from the run-of-the-mill alien run amuck in the lab type tale.

*Deep Evil* combines a science fiction plot with a strong subtext about the military and terrorism. The way in which the military police torture the surviving scientist, under the pretence of natural security, is telling. The combination of secret military operations, terrorism and alien bio weapons make this an interesting work of cinema. *Deep Evil* has its faults but as a work of late night "creature-feature" sci fi entertainment it is certainly very enjoyable.



### District 9 (2009) South Africa Cinema Release

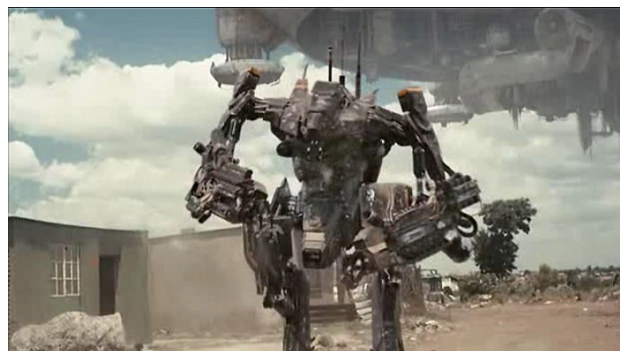
**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

This surprisingly good SF film is the first full-length feature from Writer / Director Neill Blomkamp. It is based on his earlier short film about District Six, Alive in Joburg, and was co-written with Terri Tatchell. District Six was a notorious slum area of Johannesburg in the apartheid days until it was forcibly cleared. Sixty thousand people were moved to a new camp many miles away. Blomkamp obviously remembers the forced clearing of these slums with revulsion.

This new story amplifies the earlier one and gives it a science fiction twist that is still strongly reminiscent of the days of apartheid.

Some thirty years ago a huge alien spaceship arrived above Johannesburg and just stayed there. When a group of soldiers entered the ship they found a population of starving aliens on the verge of death. The aliens were shifted down to earth and housed in a temporary camp that has now become the slum area District 9. The ship itself, apparently stranded due to lack of fuel and the loss of its command module, still hovers above the city where it has become a permanent part of the landscape.

District 9 is now marked for clearance. The aliens, tall bipedal arthropod-looking creatures nicknamed "prawns", have been trying to make do by scavenging. No one knows what they are scavenging or why. Their food choices are not to everyone's taste – they prefer cat food. A displaced Nigerian warlord is running a major



crime ring from the District, which is now a squalid slum. The alien population is well over a million. MNU, a multinational security company, has been tasked with maintaining security in the District. This has mainly involved keeping the prawns inside the District's walls. Now they have been told to move the aliens to a new camp some twenty five miles away. The humans are treating the refugee aliens with contempt which has now turned into active discrimination.

In charge of the move is Wikus van der Merwe (played by Sharlto Copley in his first feature role), son-in-law of MNU's boss. He is enthusiastic, naive, overjoyed at his new promotion, and doesn't question the orders he has been given. As he and a group of soldiers move from shack to shack spreading the word of the relocation he is accidentally sprayed by a strange biological fluid from a canister that he has turned up during a search. Alien technology is as much organic as anything else, and the liquid reacts with his body tissues and starts turning him into an alien by changing his DNA and body.

This makes Wikus of great interest to MNU as they have a store of alien weapons removed from the ship. These weapons can only be activated by the touch of alien DNA. Wikus' affliction may be the break they are looking for – a part-human, part-alien combination that can be







injected into soldiers so they can use the alien weaponry. Wikus is captured and is used to test weapons in MNU's secret genetics laboratory. The results are impressive – the weapons are powerful beyond any human technology and MNU knows that the weapons and the “virus” in Wikus’ body that activates them will be worth a great amount of money.

He is about to be dismantled for his body fluid when another trait of the “virus” becomes apparent – superhuman strength. He escapes from the laboratory, but where can he go? There is only one place where he might find sanctuary – District 9. Here he finds out the aliens’ true purpose. Will they help him? Can he help them? Friendless, hunted by MNU and the local warlord, his future looks brief.

New Zealand’s Weta Workshop was involved in the design of the alien bodies, but due to their other work commitments the execution of the aliens was realised by Image Engine in Vancouver. Weta also did the design for the alien ships.

I really liked the beautiful, moody sound track by Canadian Clinton Shorter. He has managed to

convey the darkness of the film but has superimposed African motifs in a muted way that shows the film’s South African origins without overpowering the plot.

Since this is Neill Blomkamp’s first feature film, and a fairly low-budget one at that, it could reasonably be expected that it would be a bit rough in places. It comes across remarkably well and that may be due to the influence of Peter Jackson as producer.



The veteran New Zealander was a master of low-budget films in his earlier days and he is reputed to have taken a very hands-on approach in this film. I suspect that the film’s blood-and-gore scenes are strongly Jackson-influenced, as is the handheld camera shots. The action scenes are strong if violent.

It’s hard to avoid comparing it with, say, *Starship Troopers* – there is the same slightly cartoonish larger-than-life look.

The background propaganda is there, too. The main difference is that this time it’s the humans who are in the wrong. The synergy works well and the resulting film is a great piece of science fiction.



**Forbidden Planet**  
**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Two**  
**Disc Special Edition**  
**Warner Bros**  
**R1 DVD**

*Forbidden Planet* (1956) was a highly significant science fiction film, directed by Fred M. Wilcox and starring Walter Pidgeon, Anne Francis and Leslie Nielsen. While inspired by the ideas of *The Tempest* by Shakespeare, it placed them in the context of the 23<sup>rd</sup> century with a strong dose of Freudian psychology. It was the epitome of new developments in special effects and cinema including the first use of an electronic score (focusing on the Theremin) and the powerful presence of Robby the Robot, not to mention the superb flying saucer.



The film opens in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century; the United Planets Cruiser C-57D is on the way to planet Altair IV which is quite some distance from earth. It seems some 20 years ago an earlier expedition made by the ship Bellerophon vanished and they have been sent to investigate. As they reach towards the planet they receive a rather unwelcome message from Dr. Morbius requesting them not to land. Of course they ignore such advice and on landing are informed that an unseen and uncontrollable force killed all members of the Bellerophon crew only leaving Morbius, his now deceased wife and his young and beautiful daughter, Altaira. Morbius is guarded and difficult, while Altaira, having never met anyone outside her family is effervescent and flirtatious which automatically puts her father on edge but gets the men interested. Robby the Robot is guarded and is a powerful presence throughout the film.

We soon learn the strange tale of Altair IV. It was once the home world of the Krell, who had great technological skills but for some strange reason died in a catastrophe some 200,000 years ago. The planet is powered by a strange underground installation with a vast number of nuclear reactors and also has a "plastic educator" which can be used to expand intelligence but which is very risky to humans. While Morbius found it useful, it drove the captain of the Bellerophon out of his mind.

As the crew decide to stay for a time and personal conflicts arise between Morbius, his daughter and the crew, strange events begin to occur. Machinery is destroyed and footprints



appear clearly showing the presence of an gigantic unseen creature. As more destruction occurs, one of the crew, Ostrow, decides to try and use the "plastic educator" to learn the secret of the Krell. It proves fatal but as he is dying he is able to warn the crew that the machine expands thoughts from the unconscious mind and creates "*Monsters from the Id!*"

While Morbius refuses to accept the evidence, as Altaira decides to leave with the crew and moreover declares her love for Captain Adams, the monster returns with a vengeance. Soon it becomes clear that the monster is the unconscious projection of Morbius and while he renounces his psychic creation it costs him his life. Adams, Altaira, Robby, and the surviving crew take off and witness the destruction of the planet from space.

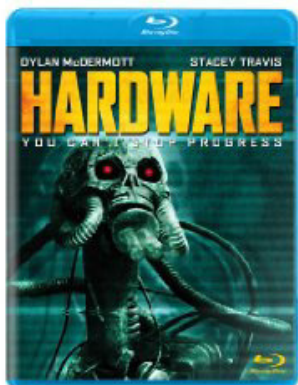
Forbidden Planet is really classic science fiction and while made ever so long ago still proves a riveting cinematic experience. The special edition from Warner Bros is close to miraculous, the depths of colour and clarity of image cannot be faulted and the DD 5.1 rendering of the score is superb, the Theremin never sounded so good. At the same time this is an edition packed with extras ranging from extremely rare deleted scenes to original lost footage never seen before.

There are three documentaries on 1950's science fiction, the making of *Forbidden Planet* and on Robby the Robot. Continuing the Robby the Robot theme they have included two follow up shows starring Robby, the feature film *The Invisible Boy* and the *The Thin pilot* episode from 1958 called *Robot Client*. There are also two excerpts from the MGM Parade TV series which featured promotions for *Forbidden Planet* and a great science fiction trailer gallery.



### Hardware Severin Films Blu Ray and DVD

*Hardware* is a superbly strange, quirky and complex science fiction from the late Eighties by director Richard Stanley. It has had a chequered history on video and DVD and the release from



Severin is nothing short of a revelation. Stanley's work is highly textured placing a strong emphasis on colour, shadows, light and dark and only a very high quality reproduction will do it justice and at last it has received the release it truly deserves. A film with influences ranging from *Blade Runner* to *Mad Max*, *Terminator* to *Predator*, it is a certainly an unusual cinematic experience.

With impressive cinematography and a superb score including everything from classical music to electro, hard rock to metal it has an immense presence and style. It is quite clear that Stanley's background in music video production has had an influence on the look of the film; he has been able to create quite an astonishing work on a very moderate budget which communicates so much via no verbal clues, mood and environment.

The future is a bleak place, the earth has been devastated by nuclear war and the sky is a constant mix of pollution and dust, stained red, the environment has been ruined by toxic waste and radiation and the temperature reaches 110 degrees in the shade. It is hard to make a living and scavengers wander the wastelands looking for scrap to sell for small amounts of cash. Mo (short of Moses) makes a deal with a wandering scavenger for a robot head and handpiece which he tries to sell on for a profit. When he cannot get what he paid he takes the head to his girlfriend Jill, a sculptor as a Christmas pre-



sent and leaves the handpiece with the second-hand dealer.

Mo and Jill have a complex relationship; Mo has lost in hand in an accident and struggles to survive. Jill has been scarred by the loss of a child and rails against the government and the world around her by making strange scrap metal sculptures which reflect her inner turmoil. Into the mix is a pervert neighbour who regularly watches and stalks Jill leaving sexually explicit messages and generally being a nuisance.

As Jill takes the head and uses it as a centre piece of her new creation, she does not realize the risk she is taking. It is actually part of the Mark 13 robot, a self repairing bot created for use in dangerous situations where it will kill anything it perceives to be alive.

It is equipped with self developing intelligence, a self repair function, a toxic chemical mix with injection facilities and infra red, soon it has tapped into her power supply and using the metal scraps on hand, from chainsaws and drills to blades, creates a body for itself and is on the warpath. It is a very cyberpunk sort of robot created from all-sorts of odds and ends and it is this "dirty" approach to technology



which makes the film so successful. This is a dark and dirty look at the future; everything is filthy, broken, disease ridden and rotten. Buildings are collapsing, everyone is ill and there is a constant feel of paranoia and dread.

The mood is extenuated by Stanley's innovative cinematography which creates a constantly suspenseful mood; he mixes news broadcasts, all sorts of music and violence and gore to create quite a unique horror science fiction amalgam.

The combination of colour filters and a carefully chosen score creates a real evocation of the environment, from the windy deserts with their blood red skies matched with electro sounds to the mechanical gnashing of Mark 14 matched with hard rock and heavy metal tunes.

Stanley also explores all manner of strange religious imagery from Mo (Moses) Jill's partner to the robot being called Mark 13. Shades, Mo's mate, worships the Buddhist god Yamantaka and there is an abundance of apocalyptic and "end of the world" iconography.

When Mo is injected by Mark 13 with a toxin, the violence psychedelic trip which occurs with Mark 13 as a sort of end of the world evil Saviour is quite literally mind boggling.

There are lots of interesting themes explored in *Hardware* from the destructive effect of mankind on the environment to eugenics. One question addressed is whether the government should limit birth (including the use of sterilization) to control the mutations caused by nuclear war and radioactive fallout.

This is a bleak world where the populace is so concerned with their own survival that they have not seen how fascistic the government has become and are kept docile with extreme sex and violence on television.

A recurring song used throughout the film is "*this is what you get/this is what you want*" and suggests that mankind's destructive urges are

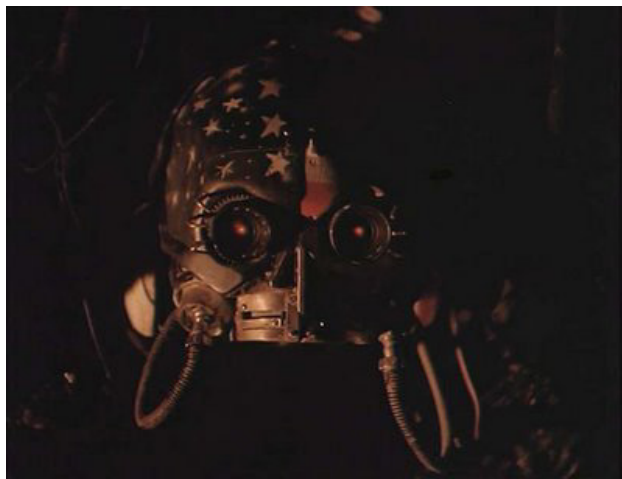


being visited back on them in the form of the Mark 13.

Whether Mark 13 is the revenge of God or the embodiment of mankind's suicidal urges is a matter for debate, Stanley seems to have used the robot as an image as a complex metaphor for a range of themes including uncontrolled mechanization, mankind's self destructiveness, the innate violence of religion and the dangers of fascism (at times the robot's head seems to resonate with imager of the death-head of the Third Reich)

The extras on both the Blu Ray and double DVD are marvellous. There is an informative and fascinating commentary. *No Flesh Shall Be Spared*, a specially made for Severin doco featuring interviews with cast and crew, it is extremely comprehensive and comes at around 50 minutes. There is a fascinating interview with Stanley on *Hardware 2* and some rare early Stanley films including *Incidents In An Expanding Universe*, an early Super 8 Version of *Hardware*, *The Sea of Perdition* and *Rites of Passage*. There are also various deleted and extra scenes and some trailers.

This really is the definitive version of this highly significant science fiction classic, superbly restored, packed with extras and fully uncensored and uncut.





### Hardwired Sony R4 DVD

*Hardwired* is an intriguing science fiction cyberpunk film with influences as diverse as Philip K Dick, William Gibson and the futuristic vision of *Blade Runner*. The film opens with a “*Blade Runner*” like future run by corporate big business and with a sky line saturated with advertising.

In many ways this opening sequence is both a blessing and a curse, while the film looks great and is filmed in high definition, the budget was clearly limited and the corporate view of the future looks, well, a bit silly. Mastercard symbols on Mount Rushmore, the McDonalds “M” on a dam and so on give the film an amateur feel which it takes a while to shake off, however, if you stick with it, it does find its feet and actually becomes a rather creative sci fi story.

Luke Gibson (Cuba Gooding Jr) has been injured in a car accident, his pregnant wife is dead and somehow his medical insurance has been terminated. The hospital is just about to write him off when the Hope Corporation steps in and offers a new but untested medical procedure involving the implanting of a computer chip directly into the back of his brain. When he wakes up he finds he has no memory and worse is plagued by strange hallucinations which awfully seem like advertising. There is a man selling an expensive wristwatch, a hot little number in red selling Whiskey and then some damn kid sprouting the virtues of chewing gun. When Gibson tries to ask questions about what has happened to him he suffers from blinding headaches associated with intense pain, something is clearly wrong.

When he finds himself driven to steal the wristwatch advertised in his mind, things goes awry; it seems the Hope Corporation is using the subjects to test a new brain based computer which can be used to implant subtle advertising clues and hence control the market in a new way. The test subjects who fail to make the grade are literally blown to pieces as the chip explodes taking their heads with it. But someone has hacked his chip and not only saved his life but are beaming instructions inside his mind to help him escape the Corporation. Soon he meets a group of nerdy computer hackers led by Michael Ironside and co-ordinated by a disabled computer



genius who survived an attack by Hope Corporation but is now incapacitated. Known by the hacker name of “Keyboard” he works with Gibson to confront those who killed his wife and finally to meet face to face with the corporate mastermind behind Project 660 (Val Kilmer).

*Hardwired* is an uneven film, the first 15 minutes are troublesome with some badly done CGI and a really silly over dramatization of the role of advertising in the future. Sure I can accept that the world may end up as a hyper urbanized city environment with a skyline filled with adverts, but the placing of corporate symbols over everything simply cheapens the concept. It would be easy to turn off during this period as the story seems clichéd and derivative. However, after a while the film seems to find its niche and begins to work exceptionally well.

The way in which instructions can be beamed directly into Gibson’s field of vision by the hacker team leads to some great action sequences and by about 30 minutes into the film it becomes a damn good thriller. There are a lot of good ideas here from the concept of the in-brain computer chip (with advertising and spam) to the Avatar system which beams a 3D image of someone into the real world.

The special effects in *Hardwired* on the whole are good except for their over enthusiastic use at the start of the film, the cinematography is excellent and the quality of the film with its high definition presentation certainly helps it punch above its budget.

The acting is overall is fairly solid, both Cuba Gooding Jr and Michael Ironside come across well. However, Val Kilmer is just plain horrible, he is a two-dimensional big corporate villain and what were they thinking when they did his hair?

*Hardwired* is not a perfect film, far from it, but as a modern cyberpunk tale it is different and certainly creative and innovative. In the days of remakes and “safe blockbusters” it is nice to see a director think “outside the box”.

**Moon**  
**Sony**  
**R4 DVD**

Moon is an indie Sci-fi film which was shot on the low budget of £2.5million, it was directed by British director Duncan Jones. His name might not ring a bell straight away, but his birth name might; "Zowie Bowie", son of the famous rockstar David Bowie. Jones, has always been determined to make a successful and independent career for himself. He went to the London film school and honed his skills making adverts; this is his first feature and has been very well received.

The world has solved its energy needs in a new and exciting way through helium mining on the moon. The energy created provides some 80% of the world with clean energy and is mined in a simple automated facility manned by a caretaker Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell). The caretaker is on a three year contract and has a companion in the form of Gerty the robot (voiced by Kevin Spacey).

Sam is coming to the end of his three year contract with Lunar Industries and cannot wait to get back to his wife and child. But things are not going as well as he would have hoped, he is having some health problems, occasional hallucinations and his wife has dumped him. After one of the collectors reports an error he goes out to investigate and has an accident.

He comes to in the infirmary with no memory of what is occurred but finds he is being kept secured in the facility and not allowed to investigate the incident. After some creative mechanics he makes it outside and heads to the scene of the accident. When he arrives he is shocked



to find a body similar to his own in the wreck.

He carries it back, barely alive, to the base and now there are two Sam Bells. Clearly something is amiss, while at first they clash, soon they work together to try and decipher the true story of what has occurred. What they discover is a powerful and melancholic reflection on the dangers of a monopoly business using cloning technology for profit and control.

This is an intelligent work of science fiction with superb dialogue and great wit. Sam Rockwell as "the clones" is truly impressive playing both roles without missing a beat and Kevin Spacey as the HAL inspired robot is marvellous.

The film certainly includes lots of homages including 2001, Alien, Silent Running, Blade Runner Outland and Solaris, but is not slavish to science fiction conventions, here Gerty the robot is helpful rather than a hindrance and the clones are portrayed in a sympathetic light.

Moon also falls offers an interesting combination of character driven psychological sci-fi and hard sci-fi. Helium-3 (HE-3) is based on real science. In nuclear fusion, multiple atomic nuclei bearing the same valence charge would be fused together, creating a release of energy. Researchers are currently using He-3 in their efforts to generate a controlled nuclear fusion reaction. It only occurs fairly on earth but is found far greater abundance in the lunar soil.

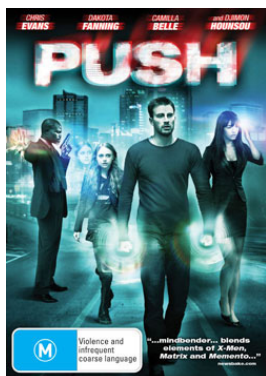
Moon has a truly retro feel and creates a unique atmosphere and mood. It is a different sort of science fiction than we are currently used to. Rather than emphasizing CGI, overpowering special effects and action this is a character driven film which is truly mesmerizing. It is a rather nice surprise for an Indie sci-fi title.





### Push Icon Films R4 DVD

*Push* is a science fiction film about people born with various psychic abilities set within the spy and thriller genre. It is a mixture of “X-Men” with a tale of government intrigue, military action and cover-ups.



It seems that the Nazis pioneered the use of Psychics as a weapon of war and since WWII the US government has run a secret military facility continuing their research, hoping to transform psychics into the ultimate military weapon, this facility is known as Division.

Thus far their success has been limited as the drugs they try to use to stimulate and control the psychic abilities of their subjects have long term effects leading to their early death.

Division has its share of critics and many psychics work outside the system, there are also many other governments and criminal organisations using individuals with such abilities. Set in the future where psychic development has reached a new level there are many different forms the abilities can take.

Pushers are the most common and can influence (to a lesser or greater extent) the minds of others while Movers can manipulate matter; Watchers can see different aspects of the future while Sniffers can decode the scent of an individual and literally track them across the globe.

There are also Shadows who can block the power of Watchers and Sniffers as long as they are within a few metres and there are the dangerous Bleeders who can shatter objects and people with the sound of their scream. There are new abilities being regularly uncovered.



The film opens as a father allows himself to be captured and killed to protect his young son who has prodigious psychic abilities. The film then cuts to many years later when that boy is now a man Nick Grant, trying to survive “off the grid” with little success. He uses his psychic gifts to make petty cash, but more often than not gets himself into trouble. It seems every time he settles down Division finds him again.

This time, however, things are very different, it seems a variant of the drug Division has been using has proved successful but has been stolen by Nick's ex-lover, Kira with the assistance of Cassie's mother, who is held captive deep within Division.

Nick now meets Cassie, a young Watcher and together they try and find the missing drug and bring down Division. Of course this is easier said than done and a complex plot unfolds of cross and double cross, mind control, psychic warfare and lots of action.

*Push* is a fascinating film which brings together impressive special effects, a complex and intriguing plot and strange and quirky characters. Chris Evans as Nick is likable and a credible lead, while Dakota Fanning as the 13 year old Watcher who acts more like an adult is eccentric to say the least. At times she is a little annoying but she certainly creates an unusual character.

I really enjoyed *Push* and felt that the mixture of what is essentially a spy story with psychic themes works well, the one-on-one battles are very well done with lots of *Matrix* like action with the Bleeders adding an unusual element. The complexity of the plot keeps you on your toes and it ends up being a very innovative science fiction thriller.

### Sanctuary Series 1 Beyond Home Entertainment (2009)

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

*Even things that go bump  
in the night need protection ...*

The premise behind Sanctuary is the existence of "abnormals", people or creatures with special abilities. Society generally refuses to acknowledge these abilities and the people who have them have been outcast. They must learn to exist in a world that is hostile to them and they must hide their abilities.

Some of the greatest people in history have been abnormals but gradually they were hunted down and killed or sterilised by a hostile church. The Sanctuary exists to provide some sort of understanding and protection for abnormals, and to investigate their strange powers. Unfortunately there is also a hostile group, the Cabal, that "collects" abnormals to harness their powers for antisocial uses.

In Old City in New York Dr Helen Magnus (Amanda Tapping, who is also Executive Producer) runs the Sanctuary. She has a long history – in fact, she is more than an hundred years old but seems to have stopped aging. In a running joke through the series she reveals that she has known many of the famous abnormals of modern history.

When the signing of the surrender of the Germans at the end of World War 2 is mentioned by Zimmerman, "I guess Ike didn't want to breathe the same air as the Nazi High Command" she drops into the conversation "Some of them didn't even breathe air". She is assisted by her daughter Ashley (Emilie Ullerup) and a genius technician, Henry (Ryan Robbins). Henry is es-



sential to the Sanctuary as he runs the defences, power and computer systems, and the cages for the dangerous abnormals. Christopher Heyerdahl plays Bigfoot, a sort of butler in the Sanctuary, but he also plays the menacing John Druitt from Dr Magnus' past (in Victorian England he was Jack the Ripper).

Dr Will Zimmerman is a forensic psychiatrist for the police. He has vague memories of his mother being killed by a monster in his youth (possibly an abnormal) and this memory has haunted him all his lonely life. In his police work he has often come across cases where the only explanation hinges on abnormal powers of the criminal.

This has not made him popular with his superiors who want conventional answers to crimes, not semi-supernatural ones. His career has been derailed and his personal life shattered by the departure of his girlfriend. When Dr Magnus offers him a job at the Sanctuary and shows him the abnormals housed there, he joins willingly.

In the thirteen episodes of Series One we see the group at work as they attempt to contact or capture abnormals. The strange powers of the abnormals make this dangerous work. In some cases they must also conceal their work from the police as the city-dwelling abnormals often commit criminal acts to survive.







The members of the group have their own internal problems as well.

Sanctuary originally started as a subscription series of eight episodes on the internet in 2007 before being funded for full production for TV for the Sci Fi Channel. Amanda Tapping is said to have put in some of her own money to get the show off the ground.

The series compressed some of the earlier episodes so they could be fitted into the one-season format, which is in a way a pity since some of the earlier detail of the characters was lost. Helen Magnus' attempts to become a medical doctor in Victorian England is an example. The final episode of this series finishes with a cliff-hanger battle with the Cabal that leads into Series Two.

The TV series was shot largely against a green screen with backgrounds added later. In most cases where this technique is used the backgrounds must be dark or the edges of the foreground characters will stand out and look very artificial. This was the case with the web episodes, which had to have a gloomy atmosphere as a result. Not so in the TV series.



The foreground and backgrounds are beautifully integrated despite being largely computer-generated. A new high-resolution RED camera allowed foregrounds to be shot at four times the resolution of ordinary digital cameras.

It would still not work without feasible plots and good acting. The series has done well here.

The plots still have a WOW factor but they are usually a little restrained so the special effects don't overpower the storyline. There are even occasional touches of humour to lighten the tense moments.

There is only one episode where the abnormals become a little too cute but I won't give away the plot of this one. The actors are all good at their work and quickly develop the personalities they will carry through the rest of the series. The overall look is a bit like a high-quality animated comic book, and it works well.

Extras include voiceovers to each episode, short documentaries on "the making of..." and details of the making of the monsters. Shots are shown of the composition of the segments from green screen to fully drawn backgrounds.

Finally, there is a beautiful, quiet theme "Symphony For A Strange World" composed by Joel Goldsmith and Neal Acree.

I simply can't remember any previous Canadian science fiction, but if this is an example of what they can do I hope we see a lot more.



**Space: 1999**  
**Year One – 30th**  
**Anniversary Edition**  
**Beyond Home**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

With the release of Star Trek in the United States in 1966 the popularity of science fiction on TV took off. In Britain there was already a sort of SF industry developing shows like the TV marionette series Thunderbirds (also mid-1960s) and the BBC's immortal Doctor Who (1963). These low-budget shows kept the genre alive until something better came along. That "something better" was *Space: 1999*.

One of the biggest expenses in this type of show was the special effects. Now CGI is extensively used but in the 1960s models were the only way get the effects. Sylvia and Gerry Anderson, the creators of the show, had sorted out their model techniques in Thunderbirds and it was only natural that their skills would be used for *Space: 1999*. So good is the model work that in many cases I believe it is better than a lot of current CGI. It was also nice to see spacesuits that didn't look like overalls with a motorbike helmet on top. It was these details that gave the show a credible look.

Britain also had a pool of good writers. Many writers contributed scripts over the years including the Andersons themselves.

The basic plot revolves around Moon Base Alpha. When atomic waste stored on the moon explodes it knocks the moon out of orbit and into space. This is the first scientific inconsistency, and there were many. Moon Base Alpha was on the far side of the moon – wouldn't the explosion have knocked the Moon closer to



earth? Regardless, the moon takes off into space where, conveniently, it passes by a new planet every week or so. The plots are generally intelligent, the actors are competent, and the show is good fun.

In one departure from the norm American Martin Landau was cast as the leading character and his British wife, Barbara Bain, as the base Doctor. Other characters appear to be trying to represent a range of nationalities. This was possibly an attempt to gain international sales, but *Space: 1999* was not to be another Doctor Who. The series lasted from 1975 to 1977, followed by a feature film.

The quality of the transfer to DVD is superb and does credit to the original producers. Like the early Star Trek and Doctor Who episodes the series looks a little dated now, but it is still a good show. In this 7-DVD set you are bound to find episodes you like. The seventh DVD has a rich mixture of deleted special effects scenes, interviews, and trailers of some of the episodes. It's a top class package and well worth a look if you are a science fiction fan.





# HISTORY OF GODZILLA IN CINEMA

(Godzilla) Gojira is a combination of two Japanese words: gorira (Gorilla) and kujira (whale), the name was chosen as Godzilla was seen as a literary cross between a whale and a Gorilla ! It sounds weird but it's true; since he walked on land and sea and had immense size and power, yet his origin was in the ocean it was felt that the combination of these two Japanese characters would suit his character well.

His beginning was in 1954 and it has been a long trek for Godzilla. Nobody working on the first film would have thought he would have made it through some 55 years, spawning a bevy of new creatures, garnering generations of new fans and changing from enemy to friend to enemy again throughout his long journey.

This is the story of just some of the Godzilla films and the themes and motifs which existed behind them; for all their B grade special effects and "man in a suit" creatures they offered fascinating plots and storylines which really chart the development of science fiction from a very early period right through until today.

## SHOWA ERA GODZILLA CINEMA

The first series of Godzilla films were known as the First Generation (Showa) era films and covered from 1955 to 1975. These form the backbone of any Godzilla collection. We are going to review a selection of these films as found in the Showa series collections from Madman Entertainment (Australia).



Showa Collection Volume 1 (Madman Entertainment) includes: *Godzilla: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Japanese and US Editions), *Mothra vs Godzilla*, *Godzilla: Invasion of the Astro-monster*, *Godzilla vs Ebirah*, *Son of Godzilla* and *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters*.

The first film was simply titled *Godzilla* (1954) and was in many ways a dark and sombre reflection on the nature of war. The tale opens as



three ships in consecutive order are destroyed by unknown forces from beneath the waves. On Ohto Island there is a legend that when food is in limited supply a great underwater creature will come to the surface and kill the country folk. Of course this is now seen as simply an old legend and the old folk who believe it are ridiculed. The tradition of sacrificing young girls to the sea monster has gone and all that is left is an antiquated exorcism rite. This theme of the clash between tradition and modernity, the difference between the “old ways” and the new Japan is central to this first film and explored throughout. Whether it be the loss of the old traditions or the juxtaposition of the traditional Japanese woman; quiet, reserved and respectful in comparison to the aggressive and rude new Japanese woman as represented by the reporter, the theme of tradition is returned to time and time again. We are also asked to consider the cause of the loss of tradition and values in the crisis of World War II.



Godzilla 1954

When Godzilla finally attacks and his footprints are studied it is discovered that he is radioactive, he has absorbed all the power of a recent nuclear disaster and his underwater environment has been destroyed. Godzilla is no longer the controllable “creature of folklore” but a post modern monster created by war and nuclear weapons. Godzilla now wreaks havoc, destroying towns and cities alike. The imagery of his attack is saturated with war iconography, buildings and people set alight and the countryside becoming “a sea of flames”. The scenes of ruin are powerfully post-Hiroshima and the film has an incredibly gloomy and sombre feel. This is not what one would traditionally see as a Godzilla film; it is clear Godzilla represents the memory of Hiroshima and the ravages of war and the way in which pre-war Japan with all its traditions has been destroyed.

The way in which Godzilla is killed is novel. The discovery of a new weapon, the Oxygen Destroyer by Serizawa brings a personal crisis to the scientist as he knows the weapon will be misused and another global battle for military supremacy will begin. He can’t bear the thought of another nuclear war and lives in self-imposed



Behind the Scenes: *Godzilla King of the Monsters*

isolation in emotional turmoil. Under pressure he decides to use the weapon to destroy Godzilla and save the world but before doing so destroys his notes and all records of his experiments. As Godzilla dies Serizawa cuts his life support cable and dies with him so his knowledge of the Oxygen Destroyer cannot be used for military purposes. The film ends on a sad note as Godzilla, once a “natural” creature, now a monster of war and nuclear weapons slowly dies through suffocation and his killer commits suicide as a martyr to peace.

When we get beyond the “man in a Godzilla suit” this is a powerful examination of the terrible effects of war. There are scenes which are genuinely moving ranging from the devastation of the countryside to the choirs of Japanese children singing for peace. This is not your average monster film and it is fascinating to see the original vision of Godzilla right at its beginning.

Also included on the first DVD is *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (1956) which is an adaptation edited for the US market with extra scenes starring Raymond Burr.

The next film presented in the Madman Showa Collection is *Mothra Vs. Godzilla*. (1964) This includes both the slightly longer Japanese edition and the US edition on the same DVD. The film centres on Mothra whose egg has been washed into the ocean by large waves caused by the after-effects of the H-Bomb. It turns up on a Japanese beach and is sold to an unscrupulous property developer.

Even after pleas from small Japanese sprites to return the egg fail, the inhabitants of Infant Is-





*Mothra Vs. Godzilla (1964)*

land are suitably annoyed with humans and their behaviour. The matter becomes all the more grave when Godzilla is awakened and attacks Japan. Soon the only hope for mankind is to ask for Mothra's help, but Mothra is dying. Can Mothra's babies be awakened in time to save mankind and what can larvae monsters do against the great Godzilla? You will just have to watch and see. In many ways *Mothra Vs. Godzilla* while continuing the strong anti-war message of the original film moves into "mythological" territory. When watching the Godzilla films you begin to see how the traditional legends and myths of Japanese animism while being lost due to the encroachment of modernity were at the same time being adapted and moulded into something new. The many creatures of these series mix together the old pagan gods of the mountains, streams and depths with post nuclear fears and debates about science and the state of Japan in relation to the rest of the world. This unique mix is what makes the Godzilla films so fascinating.

The next film in the Madman Showa series . *Godzilla: Invasion of the Astro Monster* (1965) aka *Great Monster War*, is unusual in that it featured a major Hollywood lead, Nick Adams. In many ways it is a very different sort of Godzilla film from the films that have gone before as it has a strong science fiction emphasis. It has a complex storyline involving Planet X and their attempt to conquer the earth using magnetic waves to control Ghidorah, Rodan and even Godzilla. The climax has the space organisation of Earth destroying Planet X's control over the monsters and Godzilla and Rodan battling against Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster. The complexity of Godzilla's nature is emphasised here as he becomes a hero, defeating Ghidorah and saving the earth. The film also emphasizes the importance of peace-making and diplomacy, even after Planet X attempts to destroy earth, the film concludes with ambassadors being sent to Planet X to normalise relations.

*Godzilla vs Ebirah* (1966) aka *Godzilla vs. the*

*Sea Monster* continues the monsters in battle storyline with a sub-plot about a terrorist organisation that enslaves the natives of an island for their own purposes. Godzilla plays an ambiguous role in this tale in that while he defeats Ebirah, he also challenges Mothra who is trying to save the islanders. It is Mothra who at the end of the day saves the enslaved people and Godzilla only escapes from the island in the nick of time before it explodes.

*Son of Godzilla* (1967) centres on a typical science fiction theme, the dangers of unrestrained science. When scientists try to manipulate the earth's weather patterns they find their experiments are attracting Kamacuras (Giant Mantises). They also discover that their weather control apparatus is being affected by a strong signal of unknown origins. They soon discover that it originates from a baby Godzilla, Minilla. Soon Godzilla arrives to protect the child and all breaks loose with giant Mantises, Spiders and lots of action! *Son of Godzilla* sets the stage for the final film in this superb set from Madman called *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters*.

*Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters* (1968) aka *Attack of the Marching Monsters* is a fitting climax to the first Madman Showa Collection. It has all the monsters in one film including Godzilla,

*Godzilla: Invasion of the Astro Monster* (1965)



Mothra, King Ghidorah, Rodan, Gorosaurus, Anguirus, Kumonga, Manda, Minilla, Baragon, and Varan. Again sporting a sci-fi theme this is a rip-roaring monster classic.

The monsters of the Earth have been confined in one location, the creatively named Monster Island. A control centre has been constructed underneath the island to offer scientists the ability to study these great creatures. They are under the authority of the United Nations Science Committee. However, things go terribly wrong when the monsters escape and begin to attack the world's capitals; it seems that the scientists have been brainwashed by a race of female aliens called the Kilaaks. The stage is now set for a real showdown.

The second Showa collection includes *Godzilla: All Monsters Attack*, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, *Godzilla vs. Gigan*, *Godzilla vs. Megalon*, *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* and *Terror of Mechagodzilla*.



The second collection opens with *Godzilla: All Monsters Attack* (1969), a monster film which is really geared towards a younger audience but is a lot of fun. The storyline primarily focuses on Ichiro who is the victim of bullying and gains confidence through his friendship with Minilla.

*Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, *Godzilla vs. Gigan*, *Godzilla vs. Megalon* are one on one Godzilla titles, each with their own development of the mythos. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (1971) is really quite a dark film centred on Godzilla fighting Hedorah (aka the Smog monster) who comes to earth to feed on its pollution. It has a strong and clear environmental message.

*Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972) has a body snatchers type theme with a species of insect-like aliens coming from a dying planet in the Space Hunter Nebula M hoping to invade the Earth. They have the ability to inhabit the bodies of the dead; they begin their quest by becoming the staff at World Children's Land. They hope to use Godzilla and King Ghidorah (via mind control) to control the world.

*Godzilla vs. Megalon* (1973) continues some of the environmental themes of early Godzilla films and features the undersea civilization Seatopia which has been decimated by man's nuclear



*Godzilla vs. Gigan* (1972)

testing. To stop the imminent destruction of their world, they send their god, Megalon, to destroy the man's world above the seas.

*Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* and *Terror of Mechagodzilla* offer a further development of the Godzilla franchise exploring bionic or robotic terrors. In *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (1974), the enemy is Mechagodzilla, a robot of titanic proportions that was designed and created by aliens of the Third Planet from the Black Hole to destroy Godzilla and dominate the earth. *Terror of Mechagodzilla* (1975) aka *Mechagodzilla's Counterattack* continues the bionic theme as well as adding in mad scientists! Mafune is a mad scientist who hates mankind and wishes to rebuild Mechagodzilla to destroy the world. When he meets Tsuda, who is the aide to the new alien leader Mugal from the black hole, his plans begin to come to fruition.

Once again Madman have offered an excellent collection, comprising high quality editions of the Showa Godzilla series with poster galleries and trailers. Together these two series offer the very best collection of Godzilla Showa films on the market today.

## HEISEI ERA GODZILLA CINEMA

Madman has followed the two Showa sets with a Heisei Collection. The collection includes five of the Heisei era films; *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah*, *Godzilla vs. Mothra*, *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla II*, *Godzilla vs. Spacegodzilla* and *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah*.

The term "Heisei" is used for Godzilla films from 1984 to 1995. They are marked by a very differ-



ent look and feel from the earlier films. Godzilla is far more destructive and while occasionally helpful to mankind is primarily depicted as a menace. The new design of the Godzilla suit is also far more threatening.



The Heisei-era movies all have Godzilla fighting other creatures and monsters. Like the Showa series, Godzilla adopts a son, Baby Godzilla (who becomes Godzilla Junior in later films in the series). In the final Heisei-era movie, *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah*, Godzilla is killed after undergoing experiencing a nuclear disaster, and his son Godzilla Junior absorbs the radiation and matures to become the new Godzilla.

*Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991) is remembered as a controversial Godzilla film primary for its World War II sequence where U.S. soldiers being killed by Godzillasaurus on Lagos Island, allowing Japanese soldiers to escape. The film also has a strongly critical view of communism and a time travel plot.

*Godzilla vs. Mothra* (1992) is an action packed Godzilla film with a meteor hurtling towards space, lots of monsters and a storyline about an ancient world which once had an advanced civilization with a surprising level of scientific knowledge. It is the only film to feature Battrra, the black Mothra.

*Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla II* (1993) continued the bionic theme from the Showa era films. The Japanese Defence Forces sick of battling monsters, use the remains of Mecha-King Ghidorah to create a Mechagodzilla to get rid of Godzilla once and for all.

The plot however become more complex as they uncover an egg containing a Baby Godzilla which Godzilla will fight to the death to protect. The scientists attempt to use a special weapon, the G-Crusher to attract and kill Godzilla, but instead find they have attracted Rodan, who transforming into Fire Rodan attacks them. As the battle unfold Rodan is killed and Godzilla, infuriated by Rodan's death, sets out to destroy Mechagodzilla; the film ends as he adopts Baby Godzilla as his own.

*Godzilla vs. Spacegodzilla* (1994) includes a bevy of monsters including Godzilla, Baby Godzilla, Mothra and the new enemy, Space



*Godzilla vs. Destoroyah* 1995

Godzilla. The plot of this film has all sorts of new developments including psychics and the Japanese mafia as well as old staples such as monsters from space.

Once again Japan wishes to destroy Godzilla and Project T has been working hard on the task developing a new bionic monster weapon called Moguera created from the remains of Super Mechagodzilla.

At the same time they receive a message via a fairy Mothra from Mothra (who is in space) that an evil space monster is on the way to destroy Godzilla and the earth. Soon a battle is underway in which the survival of mankind is at stake. At first Godzilla seems no match for SpaceGodzilla, but Godzilla discovers that SpaceGodzilla is using a large city tower as a source of power, absorbing its energy via crystals on its shoulders and so he is able to defeat the space monster and once again save the world.

The final Heisei era Godzilla film was *Godzilla vs. Destoroyah* (1995), is the final of the Heisei series films and climaxes with the total destruction of Tokyo, the death of Godzilla and the ascendency of Junior Godzilla to become King of the Monsters.

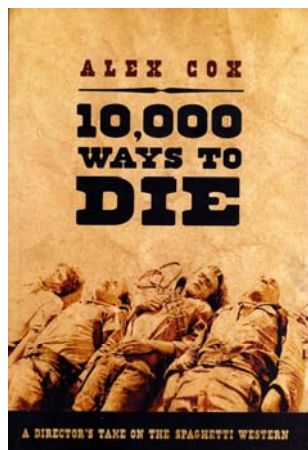
These three series from Madman offer a superb collection of Godzilla films, all offered in superb quality prints with excellent sound. The language tracks include the original Japanese with clear subtitles and English dubs.

There are some lovely extras such as both the original Japanese and US adaptation of the original Godzilla film and poster galleries and trailers. These collections are nicely packaged and very reasonably priced. They are a must-have for any Godzilla or science fiction film lover.

**10,000 Ways to Die**  
**Alex Cox**  
**Kamera Books**  
**(2009)**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Subtitled “A Director’s Take on the Spaghetti Western”, this book takes us through a genre that was widely regarded as a joke in the film industry but that the public came to love.



For some reason the Western as presented by American director John Ford was very popular in Europe. The first Italian western dates back to the silent era. Possibly it was the idea of wide open unclaimed spaces that appealed to overcrowded Europeans, or possibly the idea that there was a place for rugged individualism.

After World War 2 it looked like the American western had just about had its day but the potential European market appealed to Italian filmmakers and they kept on producing films. They also got better at them and began to make more use of the opportunities of Spanish and Yugoslav scenery. They had cheap production costs, plenty of low paid extras, good musicians and technicians, and dreadful scriptwriters. What more could you want to make low-budget westerns? A plot, for starters.

The early post-war spaghetti westerns, a derogatory term coined by the U.S. film industry and critics, were widely held to be just cheap knockoffs of basic American plotlines. Alex Cox points out that this was far from the truth. In fact the early inspiration for one plot came from an unlikely source – Japan. Akira Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* (1961) was the inspiration for Sergio Leone’s first major western, *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), and a number of other films. “Inspiration” may be the wrong word – he took Kurosawa’s storyline almost action by action and transferred it to a Western environment.

The two directors had words about this. Kurosawa in turn probably got his inspiration from an American author, Dashiell Hammett (author of stories like the Maltese Falcon). Leone also claimed Hammett as his inspiration but the stories are too close for this to be plausible.

Sergio Corbucci, who was recognized as the co-creator of the modern spaghetti western genre with Leone, based much of his film *Minnesota Clay* (also 1964) on a Marlon Brando western, *One Eyed Jacks*. Other producers, while not so obvious in their plagiarism, followed basic themes like revenge, Mexican bandits and, of course, the showdown.

There was an unwritten agreement in the U.S. that in a gunfight the shooter and the victim would not be shown in the same shot. The spaghetti western simply ignored this convention and as a result tended to look more realistic. Scenes of pain and cruelty were not as glossed over, either.

Other features that aided realism included the actors themselves. Not for them the clean, freshly laundered look of a John Ford hero. If an actor had just ridden into town after a few days in the saddle he looked dusty, scruffy, sweaty and unshaved. Leone particularly developed the close-up eyeball-and-nostril shot that showed this to perfection, if that’s the right word.

In a showdown, particularly, the measured zooming in added to the tension better than a conventional American long shot could do. *Fistful of Dollars* featured a number of close-ups of Tuco’s nostrils and badly shaven face and somehow it only made him look more evil. With Lee van Cleef it was the close-ups of his eyes that made him look menacing

The scenery and sets also seemed more realistic somehow even though they were halfway around the world from the wild west. Paint was used sparingly on a set. This gave a town a dilapidated weather-beaten look that perfectly suited the dry, dusty Spanish scenery.

The Italian version of the genre worked well with audiences. They did well in Europe and with the release of *A Fistful of Dollars* even the Americans took notice. The genre arguably reached its worldwide peak with *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* and its follow-ups of the late 1960s. Another popular series played more for laughs was the Trinity series, with its heavy reliance on slapstick-style humour.

Cox’s book is more than three quarters taken up by a detailed filmography of the genre. The amount of data is impressive. Many films were issued under different names and many actors used both their Italian or Spanish names or an English-sounding screen name.



Even the producers and directors did this. He has tracked down as many of these as possible and most of the alternate titles.

It is a valuable reference for collectors and movie lovers alike.

**And Another Thing**  
**Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy**  
**Part 6 of 3**  
**Eoin Colfer**  
**Penguin Books (2009)**

Following the death of Douglas Adams in 2001, Eoin Colfer took on the job of writing this outlined but never finished book. I was a bit apprehensive about a different writer taking over such a great series but he is a good choice as he has captured the Adams style of humour very well.

*"The Cyphroles are tiny ...gastrozoa who absorb the hostile energy emitted by their predators... This makes the predators angry and so the Cyphroles can swim faster ... gas dragons have learned to approach the Cyphroles casually, whistling a little tune or pretending to search for a few coins they have mislaid.*

*The Cyphroles always fall for these tricks as nature gave them large energy filters and tiny bullshit detectors"*

In this book we rejoin Arthur Dent as he rejoins the real world. He has spent some time in a virtual reality where, free of the risk of being blown up, he has actually found time to enjoy life and get a decent cup of tea. Readers of the series will remember that Arthur's main activity is finding new versions of Earth, then having them blown out from under him by the Vogon Destructor Fleet.

They have a contract to destroy Earth no matter whether it is a copy or exists in another dimension. The Vogons take their contract seriously and will not rest until the last Earth and Earth man (that's Arthur) are destroyed.

Just before the last Earth was blown up Zaphod Beeblebrox managed a crafty deal where some rich Earth people and their servants were transported



to a Magrathean Earth-like planet so they could avoid the destruction. The Vogons have now found out about this new Earth and it must be destroyed as well to fulfill their contract.

Arthur, of course, is now on that planet. He, Trillian, their daughter Random, Zaphod and Ford Prefect have been brought there by Wowbagger the Infinitely Prolonged. Wowbagger has had enough of his immortal life of insulting people and now wants to die.

Zaphod has promised him that his old buddy, the god Thor, can arrange that for Wowbagger (only a god can kill an immortal). Zaphod as usual has been rather free with the truth – Thor will kill him first if Zaphod cannot talk his way out of trouble. Even if he can, the Vogons will kill them all anyway when they destroy the planet. Once again it appears Arthur is going to die.

Most of the familiar characters are there. The Guide is still represented with its not-always-helpful information, such as:

*"There is a theory, postulated by Schick Brithaus, which states that the Universe is built on uncertainty and that a definitive statement / action creates a momentary energy vacuum into which flows a diametrically opposing statement / action.*

*Famous vacuum-inducing statements include..*

*Surely that's not going to fit in there?  
And I am sick of betting the same numbers every week. They are never going to come up."*

Arthur is coming to grips with his place in the Universe and is resigned to the fact that every time he starts to feel happy something will go wrong. Zaphod's ego is still bigger than many planets. The Vogons are as mindlessly bureaucratic as ever.

Although Colfer's hand is now controlling the pen it is still the world of the Hitchhikers Guide as we have come to love it.



**Danger Close**  
**Colonel Stuart Tootal DSO OBE**  
**John Murray**  
**Hachette 2009**

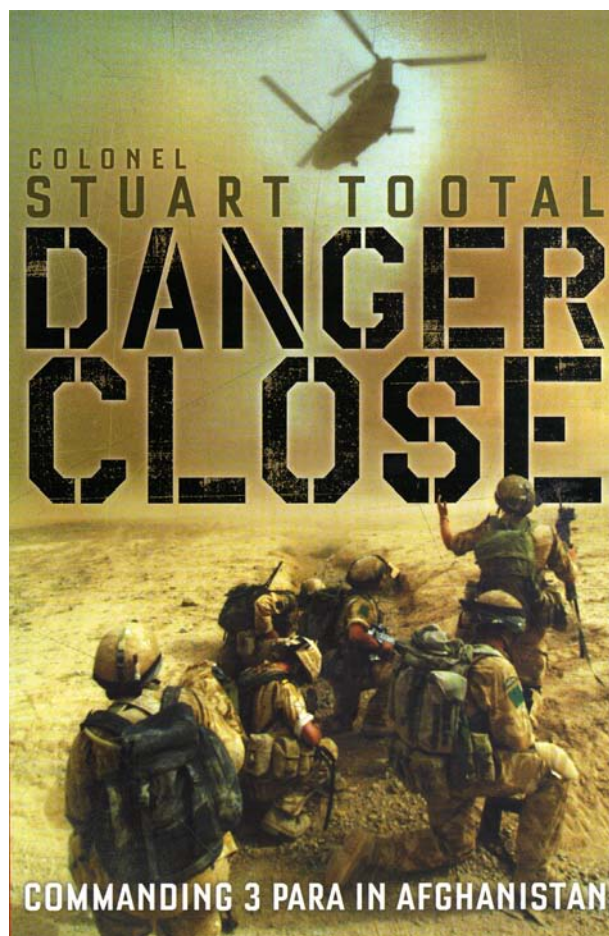
**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Colonel Tootal's book shows a depth of understanding of the war situation in Afghanistan that is rarely seen in the carefully sanitized news we get on TV. He commanded the British 3 Para Regiment whose task was to police the province of Helmand, an area that was considered "pacified". That was in 2006.

He soon discovered that the reality was completely different from what he had been led to believe. The pacified area was only that around the capital of Lashkar Gah. The rest of the province was under the control of the local Pushtun tribe who felt no allegiance to the Kabul government. There were also the local drug warlords who exercised a strong control over the opium crop, a subsidiary target the British were tasked to destroy.

To the local serf farmers opium was the only crop they could grow – stop the opium trade and they would starve. The Afghans have already expressed their attitude to this as "we grow opium to feed YOUR addicts. To stop the trade, look to your own cities".

Mixed through these people were the Taliban, based in Quetta over the border in Pakistan. They were not all religious fanatics or al-Qaeda supporters. Many were in it for a bit of excitement, not unlike young Australian soldiers in both World Wars. Some had political motives, others were out for a share of "tax" on the lucrative drug trade. Others were what the soldiers called the "\$10 Taliban", local farmers paid and "called up" as necessary.



Colonel Tootal soon realised he was in for a whole new style of warfare. Even his experience in Northern Ireland did not prepare him for how different it would be. He was facing a well-armed and motivated group that was indistinguishable from the locals. Everyone was armed. There was the language problem. The Taliban had recently won the war against the occupying Russians and their officers were trained and skilful. Effectively they controlled the northern part of the province. Always there were cultural problems and the risk of offending the Afghans, even inadvertently.

Sitting in the pacified zone around Kabul would not solve the problem – they had to retake the northern area where the Taliban and warlords had held control for far too long. This brought up another problem. Command was divided between a Canadian overall commander and two British commanders. No action could be taken without permission of at least two of these. It was a total disaster in the making and Tootal pulls no punches in his comments on these organisational problems.

The timing of his arrival coincided with the end of the opium harvest, so many young Pushtun



were now available to get up to mischief. The British could have countered with some good but minor PR jobs like fixing the washing machine in the Gereshk hospital but headquarters refused this. So did the civilian development authorities who apparently “didn’t do bricks and mortar”. They said such work was up to the Non Government Organisations, not the military. This ignored the fact that the NGOs had already moved out sensing that a battle for the province was inevitable.

Tootal describes the battles in full detail so we get a really deep understanding of the combat, the politics and the logistics problems facing his soldiers.

The descriptions of battles are typical of the problems Tootal faced day by day. The supply and transport problems were never resolved. The combination of corrupt officials, tribal feuds, disinterested locals and part-time Taliban was never understood by the Headquarters staff or the politicians. The same problems plagued the allies in the Vietnam war and in Iraq.

Time after time the situation was only saved by close air support from A10 aircraft, Apache helicopter gunships and the AC130 Spectre attack aircraft based on the venerable Hercules. The Taliban fighters ran a classical guerrilla campaign with ambushes and infiltration being their main techniques. They were quite well armed and motivated and had the advantage of knowing the territory.

Faced with superior odds they simply faded away until the next battle.

As the pattern of helicopter resupply of the outposts became known to the Taliban, it was only a matter of time before one of the scarce but essential Chinooks was shot down. The Taliban



had learned the futility of close combat with the more powerful British weapons and were now using “standoff” weapons like heavy mortars and 107mm rockets, making the task of guarding a helicopter landing zone more difficult.

To counter the longer-range attacks the British turned to their snipers. These skilled men soon made the Taliban think twice about exposing themselves. In spite of this outposts like Sangin soon ran low on ammunition and food. Parachute resupply was tried without success, so the unsatisfactory helicopter deliveries and occasional heavily armed road convoys had to carry the load.

Tootal had a compulsory two weeks leave back in Britain and paid visits to those of his injured men who had been repatriated to Britain. He was horrified at what he found. The military hospitals had been closed down and Army casualties were transferred into the National Health System.

He found uncaring administrators, medical staff who couldn’t be bothered to keep the patients informed of their progress, broken down equipment – poor treatment for men who had volunteered to join their country’s military. With a bit a pressure he was able to fix some of the more obvious problems.

By enlisting the help of the Families Office of the Battalion he was able to ensure that regular checks on the soldiers would be made but basically the medical operations were hamstrung by the usual lack of funds. Tootal is highly critical of the hospitals administration and the government of the day over this appalling treatment.



Back in Afghanistan business continued as usual. The Taliban fighters had learned from their defeats and had changed tactics, staying engaged in the fight until forced away by heavy firepower. Particularly in Sangin where the choice of routes to patrol the bazaar was limited, every patrol had to be regarded as one that would involve combat. The experienced soldiers learned to notice the signs of an impending ambush. The kids would disappear from the streets. Shopkeepers would close their doors.

People would vanish off the streets. At times like this the patrol would start warily eyeing off the rooftops for signs of an ambush and the heavy guns back at the base would be readied for fire support.

Tootal's men were now hardened veterans who passed on their knowledge to the new incoming troops. They kept trying new techniques but eventually every battle came down to one man shooting at another. As the casualties started to rise the reporters were removed from the forward battle companies.

As a result the news broadcast back home was of the "horror conditions" gained from phone conversations and leaked emails. This in turn caused distress among the families of the soldiers - when a death was reported they would wait tensely until a name was finally released. There was even talk that the soldiers were being too aggressive in their work, which ignored the fact that Helmand was not a pacified area no matter what the official line was.

Finally 3 Para reached the end of their tour, but sadly the fighting was not yet over. From Tootal's point of view a new enemy had emerged - the mindless penny-pinching bureaucracy of the British Civil Service and the politicians. He had to resort to threats of exposure of the conditions of the injured soldiers before anything could be done. Realising he could not do this from inside the Army, he resigned and stated his reasons in detail.

The letter was leaked and the public outcry at least forced some improvements but permanently injured veterans still received less than the basic wage.

As a byline, the worn-out Chinooks were still in service when he left. There were still only six of them among the entire battalion. The "development" part of the occupation still hadn't

started and effectively never has, since the area is still a hot spot. The power of the warlords has not been broken and many of the now occupy positions in the Government. The opium trade is as strong as ever.

Tootal's book is really a treatise on how not to run a war. He spares no one from the highest commanders and government ministers down, but shows respect for the men in the field. If you want background information on why the wars continue in Afghanistan, Iraq, and so many other places around the world, you will find answers in this book.

**The Dig Tree**  
**Sarah Murgatroyd**  
**Text Publishing**  
**Society (2002)**

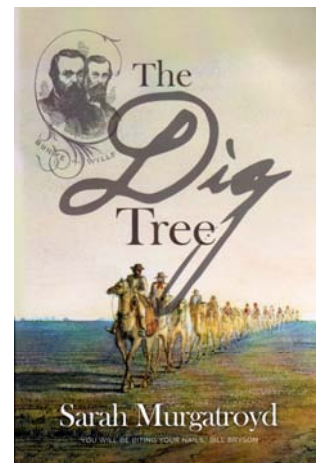
**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

The so-called Dig Tree is a marked tree in the country near Innaminka in outback Australia. This lonely artefact on the edge of a billabong on Cooper

Creek marks one of the saddest points in Australia's history. The tree still stands as a monument to colonial rivalries, the British class system and one of the most inept explorers ever to head an expedition in Australia.

The Burke and Wills Expedition as it was later christened is fully detailed in Sarah Murgatroyd's book. Unfortunately she died young at 35 years of cancer before it was published but her legacy is a detailed account of the expedition, its people and the reason for its failure. The book is a very easy read and despite the time that has passed she is able, from the remaining records, to make the characters human for us.

In the 1860s the Overland Telegraph was coming to Australia. Both Victoria and South Australia wanted to be its terminus. The problem was the huge expanse of totally unknown country in the middle of Australia. A route would have to be found that a construction crew could follow and it would need regular waterholes so telegraph repeater stations could be set up along the way.







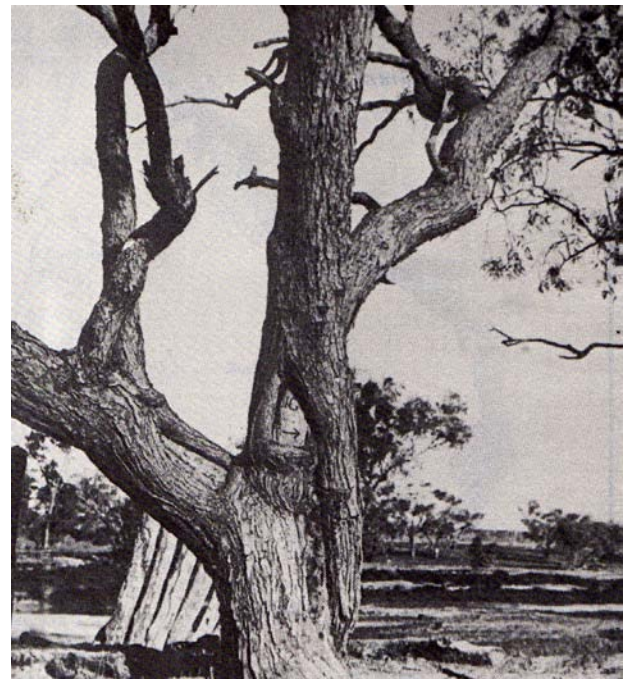
An intrepid explorer would have to cross Australia from south to north to find this route. John McDouall Stuart had already mounted two expeditions from Adelaide and had been turned back both times by the central Australian deserts. It had cost him his health and very nearly his eyesight but he was now ready to try again.

The Royal Society of Victoria decided they should mount a competing expedition and selected a police commissioner, Robert O'Hara Burke, to head it. Burke had no exploring experience whatever but he had been in the Navy and Army and was regarded as "the right sort of person" in the class-conscious aristocracy of the time.

His expedition contained a collection of scientists, camel drivers and even a couple of bushmen. William John Wills was the expedition's surveyor and navigator, as accurate maps would be needed for the Telegraph engineers to follow as they built the line.

Burke's lack of experience showed even before the expedition set out. He had over 20 tons of equipment including a timber dining table, stretcher, Chinese gong, a Union Jack and, of course, silver cutlery (for the officers).

The camels and wagons were desperately overloaded before they left Melbourne and the first one bogged down in the park where they had assembled. Somehow the expedition got as far as Menindie (now Menindee) where Burke, rash and unwilling to consider the consequences of his decisions, decided to split the party. The slower wagons would come on later and he



would take most of the expedition's transport and establish a forward depot at some suitable place.

That place was Cooper Creek. The surplus transport animals were never sent back to bring up the rest of the stores. Transport at Menindie was not available as the expedition had run out of credit and the Royal Society had no more money. At the Cooper Creek depot Burke impulsively decided to split the party again. He was going to rely on a dash to the north coast that would make him the first man to cross Australia and therefore beat John McDouall Stuart, his South Australian rival. He could be back at the depot within a couple of months, he believed.

He directed the depot manager, Brahe, to wait two months then assume he was dead or had gone back through Queensland, and to return to Menindie. In a later conflicting instruction (these changes of instructions were typical of Burke) he directed Brahe to remain at the depot regardless of circumstances. More realistic, Wills privately begged Brahe to stay at least three months if he could in case they ran late – by this stage Burke's impulsiveness and complete lack of ability was becoming obvious to all.

The summer was beginning so travelling conditions were atrocious. When they were far enough north they ran into the monsoon belt, where the heat and humidity sapped their strength and that of the horses and camels.

Burke almost made it to the coast but Wills' instruments were damaged and their exact location was uncertain.

The trip back was worse. Burke's inexperience had led him to underestimate the amount of food needed and the men were starving.

In his desperate attempts to get back to Cooper Creek he overstressed the animals and they began to die of exhaustion. They struggled back into the depot after more than three months to find Brahe had left only that morning in his own desperate attempt to get back to Menindie, since the promised relief had not arrived. He had carved a message on a tree "DIG 3 feet NW" and at that spot he buried supplies just in case Burke was still alive.

Rather than follow him towards Menindie, Burke now made his final blunder. He decided to head for a lonely Police outpost further west. Had he kept going to Menindie a relief group would have found him. Instead all the survivors now perished except one, King, who was cared for by a local aboriginal tribe.

When the news reached Melbourne it became a scandal. The Royal Society was vilified and was forced to hold an enquiry. From the start it was obvious that Brahe and King were going to be the scapegoats. The book covers the politics of the time quite well and we can only sympathise with the survivors whose ordeal was not yet over.

Expeditions were sent out to recover the bodies of Burke and Wills (but not the others). These expeditions were run by competent bushmen and it is notable that despite covering the same territory they didn't lose a single man between them. It was one of these expeditions that found King, barely alive.

The success of these expeditions only highlighted Burke's stupidity, but defeat was turned into victory by giving the two bodies a State Funeral and making them into heroes.

In Adelaide at the same time John McDouall Stuart's returning expedition was being given a heroes' welcome. He had crossed the continent further west, on a route that the Overland Telegraph and the appropriately-named Stuart Highway later followed.

We owe Sarah Murgatroyd a great deal for this

book. For too long much of Australia's history has been superficial and the details were the province of academics.

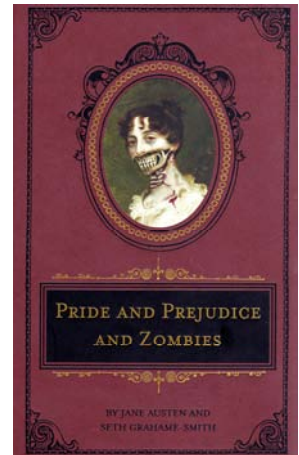
My memories of the Expedition as taught in school were summed up as "They set out to cross Australia. They died. They were heroes".

That is a long way from the truth and this excellent book tries to set the record straight.

**Pride and Prejudice and Zombies**  
By Jane Austen  
and Seth Grahame-Smith  
Quirk Books (2009)

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

*"The Classic Regency Romance – now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem"*



Hands up all those who had to read "classic" English novels like *Pride and Prejudice* in school? Hands down if you thought they were boring pieces of stilted class-ridden rubbish about people who didn't matter, and with plots where nothing much ever happened? Not many hands left now. This book is for the rest of you.

Oddly enough zombies weren't talked about much in Jane Austen's time. Polite people didn't mention them and even in this rewrite they are still called "unmentionables".

Had she been able to include zombies I am sure this is what her book would have looked like, and it would have been much more interesting. As it is, we owe it to Seth Grahame-Smith for giving us this updated and certainly more zombie-filled version.

He promises us "Now with 30% more zombies" then sets out to deliver. England has a zombie plague and the genteel rich must fight or die. Mr Bennet has taught his daughters sufficient fighting skills for them to survive, including training in Eastern martial arts.

His eldest daughter Elizabeth is one of the best. Mrs Bennet is more concerned with getting her girls good husbands. One of the most likely prospects, Mr Darcy, seems uninterested





Elizabeth lifted her skirt, disregarding modesty, and delivered a swift kick to the creature's head.

in her daughters or the sisters of his friend Mr Bingley, but he can still appreciate the Bennet girls' fighting skills.

*"Spoken like one who has never known the ecstasy of holding a still-beating heart in her hand"* says Darcy of Miss Bingley, a girl who has set out to catch him but has no fighting skills at all. He also points out that *"...the glow of the fire casts quite a revealing silhouette against the fabric of your gown"*.

While the original book was a round of social visits, the new version makes doing the social rounds dangerous. To visit a neighbour one must run the gauntlet of the local zombies and visiting is not something to be undertaken lightly. The girls are constantly having to adjust their clothing to remove body parts and bits of zombie from their gowns. Occasionally the zombies grow bold and attack the houses.

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a*

*zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains."*

Life continues as the attraction between Elizabeth and Darcy grows, fades and grows again interspersed with zombies, ninjas, misunderstandings and white phosphorus. Their affection for each other is shown through the fighting techniques they use – it is becoming a battle of wills and skills between them, not a battle to the death.

Along the way we are treated to old English customs like the Burning Grounds, a place where captured zombies are incinerated.

*"the cages were hoisted off with a large mechanical device, and swung over the flames. Elizabeth could not help but feel a sense of joy as she watched cage after cage of zombies burn – heard their terrible shrieks as the fire (which they feared above all else) licked at their feet, then ignited the whole of their putrid flesh...."*

The Bennet family goes through many trials in the course of the book. These culminate in a showdown between Elizabeth with her oriental martial arts training and Lady Catherine, Darcy's aunt, with her ninja techniques. Lady Catherine disapproves of Darcy's and Elizabeth's closeness. She would prefer Darcy to marry her daughter.

Elizabeth wins the battle and politely refrains from beheading Lady Catherine, as social custom would allow, but she now has a powerful enemy. Eventually, though, it all settles down, Elizabeth and Darcy are married, and England is kept safe from the zombies by the sword and the secrets of Shaolin.

As is appropriate with all good classic texts there is a short section of discussion topics like "Some critics have suggested that the zombies represent the authors' views toward marriage – an endless curse that sucks the life out of you and just won't die. Do you agree, or do you have another opinion about the symbolism of the unmentionables?"

This book reached a well-deserved No. 3 on the New York Times best-seller list. Although unconfirmed, it is rumoured that Grahame-Smith's next books will be Abraham Lincoln – Vampire Hunter and Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters. I can hardly wait.

**Star Trek: The Art of the Film**  
Titan Books 2009  
Scribo (Australia)

**Reviewer:**

Michelle Taylor

J.J. Abrams recent cinematic re-envisioning of the Star Trek universe (or reboot as some have called it) has confidently made a break with the past and boldly entered into an exciting new phase of Star Trek's forty odd year existence; and *Star Trek: The Art of the Film* chronicles its aesthetic development from early conceptual and commercial art, to final designs. There is a strong influence from the Star Wars universe in this film, and thus this book, with several Star Wars veterans such as Ryan Church and Alex Jaeger contributing their prodigious talents to the revitalization of this franchise. Even Mark Cotta Vaz, the author of this book has connections with Star Wars going back some years. On reflection this is of course no surprise as Industrial Light & Magic was put in charge of updating and redesigning the entire Star Trek aesthetic early on; with the aim of appealing to a younger generation of audiences who haven't grown up with Trek, and who aren't encumbered with preconceived notions of what it should look like. This fascinating book is virtually overflowing with some of the most visually stunning and beautifully imagined CGI, art and design ever to have been created for this most enduring of franchises, and in one word, is engrossing.

The chapters logically follow the sequences of the film itself, beginning with the almost submarine like designs for the U.S.S. Kelvin and ending with a chapter briefly covering the truly inspired poster campaign. From cover to cover hundreds of photos in gorgeous saturated colours are featured to give you an idea of how a particular scene, costume, prosthetic or even set was originally conceived by the concept artist or production designer and then vividly brought to life in the final theatrical release of the film. The descriptive text is written in an intelligent, clear and concise manner that is regularly interspersed throughout the book; a short preface and a humorous forward by Mr Abrams himself are also included in the first few pages, succinctly followed by a revealing introduction titled: The Future Begins...



Wanting to bring newer sensibilities to the Star Trek franchise J.J. Abrams and his team have almost entirely eschewed the past in favour of an ultramodern, sleek and sexy look that it was hoped would appeal to both devoted trekkies, and potential new fans. Yet even in their aim to completely re-envision Star Trek for contemporary audiences they were always fully aware of the fact that certain key aspects of its design vocabulary should be treated with the utmost respect, while other aspects could be cast anew. If anything the production team were in the unenviable position of wanting to create something that's vitally modern; yet at the same time also wanting to pay homage to all that's gone before, and not alienate existing fans in the process. On one hand I admire this goal; for by bringing in people who've not worked on Star Trek productions before they were given free rein to think out of the box and come up with clever new ideas, yet on the other hand much of the distinctive Star Trek aesthetic that's evolved over the past four decades or so seems to have been totally discarded in favour of the shiny and the new. But I have to admit that somehow they've pulled off this fine balancing act, and still given the film a credible Star Trek ambience.

I also have to admit that I am slightly uncomfortable with the overall Star Wars treatment this film has been given; from the massive advertising blitz and media campaign to the tacky product placements, it's never really been done for a Trek production before... and I feel that cheapened it somewhat. But luckily this wonderful book is another story altogether and I would definitely highly recommend it to anyone who's ever been interested in conceptual and commercial art for films, or indeed for television. And hopefully like the film itself, you'll end up loving it about as much as I do! Live long and prosper!



**9**  
**Universal**  
**R1 DVD**

From visionary filmmakers Tim Burton and Timur Bekmambetov (*Wanted*) and director Shane Acker comes this eccentric and unusual visual feast. Featuring the voices of Elijah Wood, John C. Reilly, Jennifer Connelly, Crispin Glover among others it weaves a strange and wonderful tale which is both enthralling and captivating.



Never one to shy away from darker themes Burton had made sure the film also has its measure of insightful themes and reflective content. This is not "Disney" animation filled with wonder and colour, this is a melancholic post-apocalyptic world where the difference between the new world and the old is nine rag tag dolls.

Humanity has reached its zenith and fallen, a scientist has created the ultimate machine, one which will make other machines and herald a new age of peace.

As with all ground-breaking inventions it has been taken over by the military and is now a weapon of war in the hand of a Nazi like dictator. "The Machine" however is not simply a piece of tech, the scientist made it self-aware and soon it turns against its controller and by default, mankind and the war between machine and man reduces the surface of the world to dust and destroys all traces of the human race.

As the days of man are numbered, the scientist realizes the error of his ways and using an

"alchemical" device transfers his soul into nine small rag dolls. Each reflects aspects of his character and are stitched together from all sorts of odds and ends, cloth, clock parts, lens and zippers. As the last one is made, number 9 he dies.

When Number 9 awakens (Elijah Wood), he wanders into an alien world, attacked by a giant cat like robot he is defended by another doll and meets a group of dolls trying to survive in a hostile world.

The doll community is having a hard time of it as monster machines still roam the planet and their own society has developed a hierarchy which seems as oppressive as the one it has replaced. Number 1 (Christopher Plummer) is arrogant and controlling as the leader and dominates the others through Number 8 (Fred Tasciore) the military doll. Number 1 follows the path of least resistance and they live in fear hidden inside a broken down building.

Number 9 is not convinced by their pacifist stance and decides to go after the doll who saved him but was captured by the monster call. While he rescues his friend, he makes a fatal mistake, he places a device that he found inside his chest in a larger machine and "The Machine" comes to life. Now these small dolls must do battle for the very future of humanity and their survival hangs by a thread.

This is a visually stunning film with lots of superb character development, fascinating themes and a bleak view of the future. Each of the voice actors do an excellent job and the dolls shine as real personalities.

The imagery of the film is loaded with reflections on fascism, WWII and a world where technology and the machine has replaced human compassion.

These themes are presented in both animation and comic book manner and while a bit heavy handled communicate well. At time the films is uneven with a slight overemphasis on the whizz bang battles against the monster machines but this is a minor quibble.

9 is an unusual animated feature in that it while it certainly has its emotional moments, it is not the sort of sentimental and mawkish animation that is ever so popular. It is dark, melancholic and even the ending leaves us to ponder what the future may hold.



**Above and Beyond  
(2006)**  
Timeless Media Group  
Anchor bay  
R4 DVD

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich



Just after the outbreak of World War 2 Britain found itself in a desperate situation. Low on war equipment, it was forced to import many supplies including aircraft from the United States. Germany had learning from its experience in the first World War and was waging heavy submarine warfare against the vital shipping. Lord Beaverbrook, an abrasive, forceful but intelligent man, was getting British aircraft production into shape but Britain simply didn't have the resources to build all the aircraft it needed. The United States did, so Britain was shipping dismantled aircraft across the Atlantic. The losses from U-boats were crippling and clearly another method was needed.

One untested option was flying the aircraft across from Canada to Ireland. This was also risky since the aircraft would be at the very limits of their range even with extra fuel tanks. The RAF was not in favour of the idea, seeing only a tremendous loss of their pilots and flying staff, so Beaverbrook set up a civilian organisation to ferry the aircraft to Britain. This four-hour miniseries is based on the early history of that organisation, which later became the RAF's Ferry Command.

The aircraft most needed was the Hudson bomber. It was an ideal aircraft for Coastal Command to patrol the seas around Britain in the hunt for U-boats. The next thing needed was an airfield. There was already a huge but largely unused airport at Gander on the eastern coast of Canada's Newfoundland. It had been built in anticipation of cross-Atlantic passenger flights but the war intervened.

Volunteer pilots were enlisted from all over Canada, but they had to be taught many of the rudiments of flying over water and through bad weather— celestial navigation was a problem area from the start. Oxygen was needed to fly above the Atlantic storms. Mechanically the Hudson was rather overstressed and breakdowns were common and sometimes fatal. There was also a risk from stray German planes. The Hudsons were unarmed to save



weight so more fuel could be packed in. In the series we follow the training of the pilots and the development of the airfield into a semi-military base as it carried more and more planes. The Ferry idea worked but not without loss of life. By war's end five hundred aircrew had been lost. Once the concept was proven with the delivery of nearly three hundred aircraft the vultures started to circle, with takeover moves being made by the RAF, the Canadian Air Force and even the United States Army Air Force. Eventually politics won out and the proud little civilian organisation was absorbed into the RAF. The series finishes at this point.

There are, of course, a flamboyant flyboy hero and his love interest, and a rival. The political workings of Churchill's Cabinet are not shown in a favourable light – it often seems the Cabinet was fighting each other while the Newfoundlanders were fighting the war in the best way they could. The personalities in the film, especially the pilots, are somewhat caricatured but this strangely lends an air of authenticity to the film. You could not expect a bunch of bush pilots and crop-dusters to be entirely normal.

Captain Bennett, played strongly by Richard E Grant, is the RAF man sent over to organise the show and train the pilots. He is rather stiff at first but he comes to know his pilots and shows concern for their safety. This is in spite of Beaverbrook's insistence that some losses – say, four out of seven aircraft – are acceptable. To Beaverbrook that was four aircraft, but to Bennett it was twelve of his men.

There are few Lockheed Hudsons still flying so the one aircraft the film company was able to get was cloned digitally and reused many times over to fill the airfield with planes. Some of the shots therefore look a little artificial but this is really a minor gripe about a great film. There are also some errors in the aircraft themselves but they don't detract from the story. It shows a very underappreciated part of the war and does due credit to the civilian fliers who risked their lives to get the aircraft to Britain.



### Alfred Hitchcock Presents Madman R4 DVD

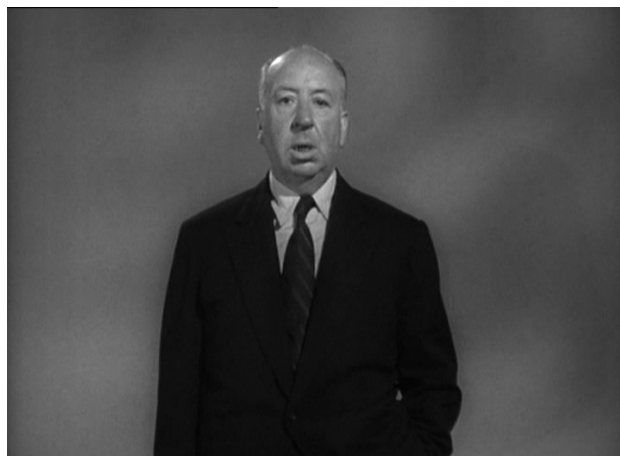
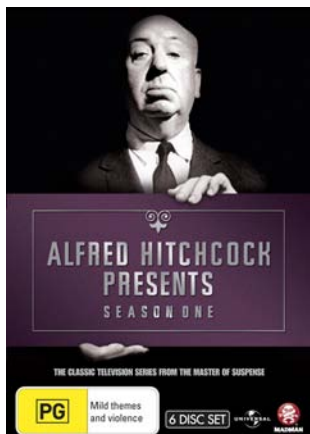
**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Sir Alfred Hitchcock started work directing in Britain, but moved to the United States in 1939. Most of his best work was done here. Traditionally the Producer set the tone of a film but Hitchcock soon made the Director's role more critical. He directed over fifty feature films like *Dial M For Murder*, *Lifeboat*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, and *The Thirty Nine Steps*. Although his film work was popular with film audiences, it was the TV series Alfred Hitchcock Presents that really showed his skills.

The long series of (initially) 30-minute plays began in 1955. They were mostly suspense-based but he also sometimes brought in an element of fantasy. His main theme was the inherent weaknesses in all of us. He would sometimes highlight this by transferring those weaknesses to another character to show different reactions.

Many well-known actors appeared on the show over the years. Some like Claude Rains appeared many times. This tends to give the lie to the rumour that Hitchcock was "hard to work for". He may have been a perfectionist but many up and coming actors and actresses got a start by appearing on the show.

To be invited back by "The Master Of Suspense" was an accolade. Hitchcock started nearly all episodes with a silhouette of himself



walking on stage and lining up with a drawing of his rather rotund profile. He would then begin "Good Evening ...." and introduce the night's episode. He would then recap at the end and provide the compulsory information that the killer was caught and was now doing time, etc. The final comments were usually to satisfy the wowers who wanted to see justice triumph. Left to Hitchcock the audience would probably be left hanging, a more satisfactory state of affairs for such a show. He would sometimes include a sly little dig at his sponsors as well. "You see, crime does not pay, even on television. You must have a sponsor".

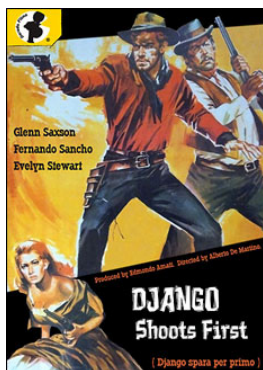
The first DVD set covers Season 1's 39 episodes and is a good introduction to Hitchcock's work. Seasons 2 and 3 are also available through Madman. Each set includes a booklet with a brief episode summary and sometimes details of the actors. After the first series the series was recognised as a showplace for quality actors. The list of actors includes many great names and quite a few newcomers who went on to achieve fame. The quality is excellent for early TV film. Don't be put off by the black and white cinematography - the plays are more powerful for the lack of distraction of colour.



**Django Shoots First**  
**Rereleased 2009**  
**Spaghetti Western**  
**Dorado Films**  
**R1 DVD**

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

*Django Shoots First* aka *Django Spara per Primo* is presented in over-dubbed Italian.



In 1966 Sergio Corbucci released *Django* and started a trend that just about every Italian filmmaker wanted a part of. The film may have been based heavily on the Japanese revenge film *Yojimbo* but Corbucci made *Django* his own film with excessive violence and a general over-the-top feel that was to characterise so many spaghetti Westerns in the future.

More than a hundred *Django* films were released. Franco Nero starred in Corbucci's films. In others, sometimes there wasn't even a character named *Django* – the name just had to be in the title. An example is Leon Klimovsky's *Dollars For Django*. Many films were shot under one name then quickly retitled to cash in on the *Django* name.

*In Django Shoots First* we are looking at one of the 1966 copies that was hurried out. I have selected this film for a number of reasons. It includes just about every cliché ever used in a Western. It continues the theme of the lone gunslinger bent on revenge.

Finally in this film you can see a strong resemblance to the later *My Name Is Trinity* series. The *Trinity* characters have more than a passing resemblance to the characters in this film and the light touches of humour carried on to the later film as well.

*Django* (actually his son) is played here by Roel Bos (stage name Glenn Saxson). He is befriended by the usual lovable town drunk and rogue



played by Fernando Sancho (playing a goodie for a change).

*Django* is riding in to the town of Silver Springs when he meets a bounty hunter carrying the body of his father. He finds that his father had a five thousand dollar reward on him. Someone hated him pretty badly. He shoots the bounty hunter then takes the body into town to cash in on the bounty, figuring that his father left him nothing else.

In town he is told that his father really owned a half share in the bank, the saloon and a number of local ranches. He meets Clusker, the crooked local banker, and the trouble begins.

There are the compulsory barroom brawls, main street gunfights, double crosses, posses riding hither and yon, fistfights, and all the other clichés. There is also the girl who runs the saloon and who falls in love with *Django*.

The whole film is quite well done and beautifully filmed. Bruno Nicolai's background music track, while not as memorable as some, does credit to the film.

The restoration of the original Technicolor and CinemaScope film is a good quality transfer and even the voice overdubbing, often laughable in Italian films, is done well.

The film is a fine example of the genre with a tight, active plot, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It's not great cinema but it is great fun.



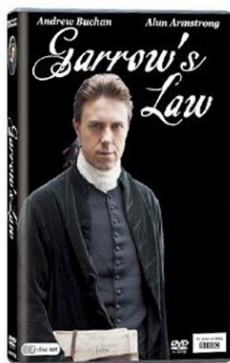


### Garrow's Law Acorn Media UK R1 DVD

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the law was very different to what we have today. All that was necessary to have a person indicted for trial was a sworn complaint in front of a magistrate. There was no Police Force yet so prosecutions were either brought by the Crown or were privately brought. It was then up to the defendant to prove in Court that they were innocent. In most cases the defence Counsel didn't even know what all the evidence against their client was. All they had to fall back on were character witnesses. They were not even allowed to address the Jury. The Court's decision often depended simply on how rich or influential you were. Justice was a concept that was rarely involved in the process. The Law itself was a mix of old brutal laws and modern inconsistent ones. The Judges were not above directing the Jury as to the prisoner's guilt. The whole system desperately needed reform.

William Garrow is a young barrister who wanted to change the system and remove what he saw as injustices and inconsistency. He served his legal apprenticeship with an old lawyer named John Southouse, who continued to mentor Garrow through his early Court appearances at the Old Bailey. Garrow made extensive use of cross-examination to get at the truth of a case. This did not make him popular with the prosecutors, the judges, or the politicians who did not want the system changed. It must be remembered that at this time punishment included branding, hanging, or transportation to New South Wales. Many people in the upper class thought that killing off or exporting their criminals would make England a safer place. Sorting out the innocent ones first was not really important.



Garrow and his cases are based on records held by the Old Bailey. The four-part series covers some of Garrow's early cases and gives an excellent idea of the criminal system at the time. It was known as the "Inquisitorial System", where the Judge ran the case. The Courts were a popular entertainment venue, but Garrow's surprising results from his cross-examinations soon made them even more popular.

Garrow later became Solicitor General and then Attorney General and brought in many reforms. One was changing to the "Adversarial System" where the Judge became simply a referee and the case for guilt or innocence was argued out by the Counsels and supported by evidence, and the circus atmosphere was tempered by a little more dignity. .

Within the first episode we have a good picture of the characters of the main players. This can only be put down to superb acting and scripting. The storylines very quickly give us an idea of the state of "justice" in those times.

The first DVD includes a "Making Of ..." featurette that is impressive for the detail it shows of how to make a period drama. There is a certain pride in the behind-the-scenes staff in getting it absolutely right.

The series did well when it was launched on BBC1 in primetime this year. At only four episodes it is far too short, but surely we will see a second series? Soon, I hope.



**Gatling Gun**  
1968, re-released 2009  
Dorado Films  
R1 DVD

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Dr Richard Gatling has been kidnapped and his revolutionary machine gun stolen by Tarpas, a half breed bandit from Las Cruces. He intends to ransom Gatling to the Union for a million dollars and sell the gun to the Confederacy for another million.

Chris Tanner, a Federal Agent, is one of the few who knew about the gun and its whereabouts and he has been framed for its theft. He is due to hang. His boss, Pinkerton, gets him out of prison so he can track down the gun and Dr Gatling. Tanner only has a month to complete his mission. If he fails his boss will hang in his place.

Tanner is sent out disguised as a local man who is also due to hang. He carries a message to the man's brothers explaining that they must help Tanner. One brother believes Tanner has killed his brother and sets out to kill Tanner. So, it seems, does everyone else in town. Even the local Federal Agent is not above a bit of betrayal. Tanner spends most of the film getting kicked, punched or shot. He rises above these inconveniences and saves the day and Dr Gatling.



The film is a little unusual for a spaghetti western in that it doesn't depend too much on Western clichés like barroom brawls. There is plenty of blood and killing but it's all part of the story, not just gratuitous. With the reasonably intelligent plot comes some good acting and great cinematography.

One odd "feature" was the way the English soundtrack cuts back to Italian with English subtitles occasionally. This is because Dorado films had to reassemble the full film by including some non-English-dubbed cuts. An significant piece of work to make this rare film available once again.

Another odd feature is the theme music, a strange mix of generic "tunes" that seem to have been played on a Hammond Organ – not exactly authentic western.

Dorado Films have, as usual, done a great job with the restoration. As an example of the spaghetti western genre this one should not be overlooked.





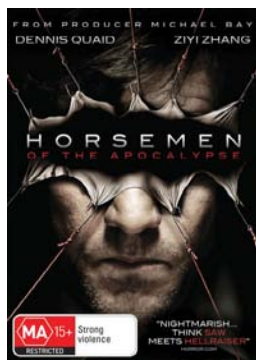
## Horseman of the Apocalypse Icon Films R4 DVD

Horseman of the Apocalypse is a strange and unusual film matching family dysfunction with a *Se7en* like serial killer drama and elements akin to the *Saw* series. At first I was a little perturbed that this was little more than a *Se7en* copy, but as the film developed it certainly displayed more than a little ingenuity creating a very unusual drama which combines a bizarre plot with some very unusual twists and turns.

Detective Aidan Breslin struggles to balance the needs of his two sons with his ever demanding police career, even more so since the death of his wife. His work as a forensic dentist as well as a detective means he is on call on unusual cases and this means that his oldest son Alex is left to grieve for his mother's death alone and to take care of his younger brother.

Breslin is called to a strange scene out in the middle of nowhere. There has been a ceremonial style killing with "Come and See" marking each direction and a bowl filled with teeth removed from someone with pliers. This discovery is soon followed by a range of extremely brutal killings each one marked by the use of "suspension equipment", ritualistic elements and religious symbolism. Soon Breslin comes to realize these four killings are part of some strange re-interpretation of the Four Horseman of the Apocalypse where those who have been wronged each unveil a killing to highlight the suffering they have experienced.

Kristin, a young girl sexually abused by her adoptive father and Corey, a young gay man rejected by his father, show the work their pain. Pestilence, however, gets a bad reception as he distorts the process for petty revenge. Soon we realize a bigger picture is unfolding as a website



with millions of members called "We are the Nothing" are waiting the final revelation of death, who it seems might just be closer to home than Breslin realizes.

The combination of abuse and hurt youngsters expressing their angst through violence and torture is both confronting and provocative. You repulsion at the sheer brutality of the violence (especially in the case of Kristin) and yet somehow sympathize with what has made her what she is. There is a complexity in the ideas behind this story which is impressive. The final revelation of who Death is and the circumstances which have created him is inventive and moving since you have come to understand the situation as the film has unfolded but just not appreciated the significance.

Dennis Quaid is excellent in the role of Breslin and balances the two essential elements of the story, familial dysfunction and a detective/serial killer tale. The way in which the killers (The Horseman) use pain and suffering to reveal the nature of the world is somewhat akin to Jigsaw in the *Saw* films but not enough to suggest the film is in any way derivative. The violence and gore is strong but not sensationalist or gratuitous.

The unexpected conclusion to the tale, the tone of the film which uses Biblical references and bleak cinematography (with an emphasis on snow, ice and cold) make this an intriguing and refreshing take on the genre.



**Where the Wild Things Are  
Spike Jonze  
Cinema Release**

Based on the highly successful kid's book by Maurice Sendak, Spike Jonze uses his background knowledge of Sendak himself to expand the simple tale into quite an amazing work of cinema.



*Where the Wild Things Are* is a book of only 20 some lines, it is ambiguous and borders between dream and fantasy. In many ways it is a hard ask of any filmmaker to turn this into a full length film. In many ways what Jonze has done is quite unusual; he has made a film which is more for adults reflecting on their childhood than for children at all. It is a melancholic film filled to the brim with emotional dysfunction, loneliness and complex themes.

The journey Max makes is really the descent into the unconscious or dream state. In many psychological schools a journey across a tempestuous ocean is used to represent a descent into the lower reaches of the psyche and the monsters all seem to represent the neurosis which not only make up Max but all of us.

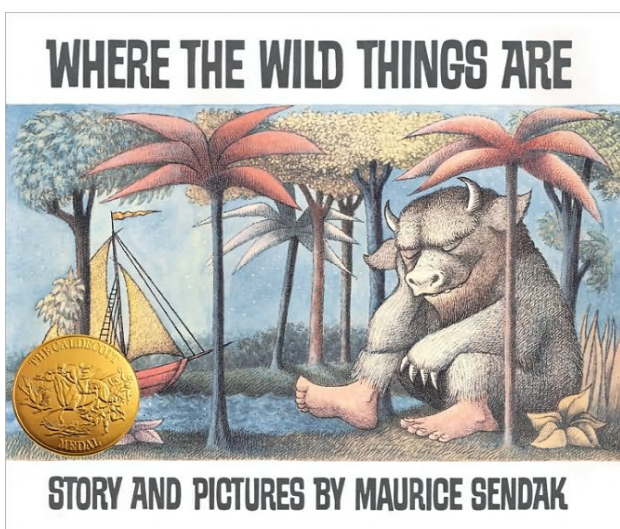
Certainly aspects of Maurice Sendak's own experience as a highly intelligent but "outsider" child who knew he was different (he is gay), created an undercurrent in both the book and the film, but this should not be overemphasized, this is a honest portrayal of the experience of many during childhood.



The fact that Sendak's partner was psychoanalyst Eugene Glynn (with whom he lived with for 50 years before Glynn's death in May 2007) helps reinforce the likely psychological interpretations of both and book and the film. Sendak has regularly encoded such references into his titles, for example, Sendak has discussed how he used Holocaust imagery in *In the Night Kitchen*.

Today with the upsurge of "family values" there is a tendency to turn childhood into some sort of "Edenic time" where everything is marvellous and lovely. Any psychologist will tell you this is not so and this amazing film offers a powerful portrayal of the confusion of that period within the framework of a strange and wonderful fantasy.

Max is a lonely and hyperactive young boy living with his mother and sister. His sister has older friends and he is regularly left alone. To top it all off, his mother has brought home a







guest and Max feels his isn't getting the constant attention he so desperately needs. They get into an argument and a bit of a tussle and Max bites his mother on the shoulder and bolts from the house.

What happens next is anyone's guess! Does he race mile after mile and find a boat which crosses great seas and takes him to Where The Wild Things Are or does he fall asleep after a long run and drifts into a dream state where the whole story happens.

In any event, Max lands in a strange and wonderful kingdom filled with angry and neurotic monsters, filled with fears and loneliness just like him. Soon he has made friends with the hot tempered Carol who being insecure like Max wants to keep everyone together.

After being threatened with being eaten, Max spins a tale about his strength and wisdom and they make him their king. Max soon learns that being the King is not all it is cracked up to be and even in the land of the monsters he must face the same emotional difficulties he found in the real world.

This is an incredibly beautiful film; moving, emo-



tionally powerful and visually astonishing. The cinematography is superb and is accompanied by great soundtrack made up of some very memorable songs. Certainly one of the most amazing feats is making the creatures so utter believable.

The character development is deep and profound, Carol (James Gandolfini) is the lonely protective monster who is in love with KW, KW (Lauren Ambrose) still loves Carol but finds his emotional turmoil difficult to handle, she is also a bit eccentric. Douglas (Chris Cooper) is a quiet fellow, best friend to Judith (Catherine O'Hara), who is bitter and a bit difficult. Ira (Forest Whitaker) is pleasant and supportive but timid, and then there is Alexander (Paul Dano) whose opinion never seems valued, who is the smallest monster of all.

Max Records who plays Max certainly lives up to the role and gives a perfect performance, he will have a great future in acting.

If this film had been made by anyone else it would have been sentimental and even soppy, yet there is an honesty which makes this film quite unique within this genre of entertainment. While marketed as a film for adults, mature children would get a lot from it as well, but it is very hard to pigeonhole and hence will stand as one of the more unique films about childhood every made.



## Young Soul Rebels

BFI  
R2 DVD

*Young Soul Rebels* is an affectionate journey back to 1977 to a time where cultures and lifestyles mix and collide. It was both a period of great opportunity and of exceptional conflict when racial, sexual and political tensions were the pulse of the day and the airways were filled with burgeoning new music forms of punk, soul and funk.

*Young Soul Rebels* is a film which resonates with music, it has an amazing soundtrack and a powerful sense of nostalgia, it truly evokes the late Seventies and you can easily feel transported to this great period of change.

The film opens with the murder of T.J, he is cruising a local gay haunt and confronted by someone he thinks wants a good time. Soon it becomes obvious the intention of his visitor is darker and T.J is killed.

As the film opens you are left to ponder whether his killing is racist, homophobic or opportunistic and this sets the stage for the murder mystery aspect of the film. In my mind the whodunit part of the tale is the least significant but at the same time it allows the filmmaker to explore themes of authority, police harassment and the alienation felt by racial and sexual minorities.

For me the focus of the film is on friendship. Chris and Caz have known each other since childhood. Chris is straight yet effeminate and boyish, Caz is macho yet openly gay, he regularly uses beats and cruises for anonymous sex. Together they run Soul Patrol, a pirate radio station broadcasting funky tunes from their friend's garage. They have a powerful sense of mission about what they do but sadly this is not shared by the world around them. Their attempts to



make it in the entertainment industry are re-buffed because they are unwilling to compromise their vision of what the future of music should be. The conflict between the old establishment and the younger generation is a recurring theme throughout the film.

As the police blunder through their investigation of the killing with the expected racism and homophobia the ramifications resonate throughout the whole community. The situation becomes more complex as Chris visits the scene of the crime and his sister finds the boom box T. J. was carrying when he was killed, ominously it contains a tape of the killer's voice.

*Young Soul Rebels* offers an insightful look into the black gay lifestyle of the late Seventies, the film focuses on the mixed race and pan sexual club The Crypt showing the diversity of the world in which Chris and Caz move, it also explores the development white skinhead scene and the racial tensions of the period. It is beautifully filmed, superbly acted and keeps you engaged throughout.

*Young Soul Rebels* won the Cannes Critics' Week prize and offers an exhilarating score including music by Funkadelic, Sylvester, Parliament and X-Ray Spex. The film has been masterfully restored by the British Film Institute and is presented in 1.77:1 Anamorphic Widescreen. It also includes a nicely illustrated booklet with a newly commissioned preface by Isaac Julien, an essay by film historian Stephen Bourne and more.





**Dylan Moran:  
What It Is Live  
2009  
Universal Studios  
R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Who is Dylan Moran? If I mentioned Bernard from the British TV comedy *Black Books*, would you remember the drunken lazy Irishman Bernard Black with a down on the world, his customers, and his life?

He also made appearances in *Shaun of the Dead*, *A Film With Me In It*, and *Run Fatboy Run*. His grounding in comedy came from the many Comedy Festivals, where he has had a lot of success. This is a hard field to excel in but his first win was at the Edinburgh Festival in 1993. He has come a long way since then.

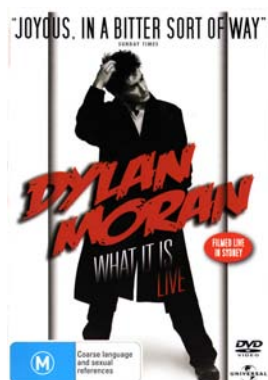
In this DVD Moran gives us his stand-up comedy routine. This one was filmed in Sydney. He comes on stage looking a lot like Bernard Black – hair everywhere, Irish accent and possibly just a little drunk-looking. This seems to make him instantly familiar to the audience and they quickly settle in for the night's entertainment.

His show also has a lot of Bernard Black in it – the same ranting about trivia, the same irrational barbed dislike of the oddest things. He focuses mainly on people and their relationships and manages to cover a lot of ground during the show. Wait until he gets started on curtains as a sign that your life has ended. I also learned more about the fetish of "furries" than I ever wanted to know.

Surprisingly he manages to keep the monologue going for well over an hour without excessive swearing or reference to sex – it's there but done in a minor and humorous way that adds to the show. It comes across as just a part of his character, not something used to excess to try to shock an audience.

This works well to develop his on-stage persona into someone the audience relates to. It's not offensive – it's just the way he is.

Dylan's delivery is faultless and flows well. He does not follow the American technique of the one-liner (then wait for laughter). His delivery is



a slower, more rambling build-up to the final explosion about his current subject. Again, this works well for his style. He is not showing off to us, he is leading us gently in the direction he is going.



He uses the full stage during his show. He seems to be wandering aimlessly but I noticed after a while he was making eye contact with most of his audience this way – no one would feel as if they were being left out just because they were off to one side of the theatre. It may also be a result of his arm movements. Dylan is a very lively comedian and his arms talk almost as much as he does. This again gives him the appearance of an amiable drunk on his way home from the pub.

I found Dylan to be a very comfortable comedian to listen to. He is not in-your-face or offensive. He is rambling and non-threatening and has that Irish tendency towards exaggeration that can make any situation seem funny.

**Gambit  
Second Sight Films  
R2 DVD**

Gambit is witty comedy with a wry sense of humour starring Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine. It was released in 1967 and was part of Hollywood's romantic crime comedy obsession.

Films such as *Charade* (1963) and *How to Steal a Million* (1966) worked a charm and *Gambit* was part of this rich genre. Filled with exotic locations, strange characters and great dialogue it is a form of comedy somewhat overlooked today.

Ahmad Shahbandar (Herbert Lom) is one of the richest men in the world and lives as a recluse, he has supposedly never gotten over the death of his wife and is portrayed in the newspapers as somewhat of a melancholic eccentric. The problem is that this is all media hype generated by Shahbandar to protect his privacy.



He is actually a very shrewd businessman and knows all the tricks of the trade; he hasn't earned his wealth by being naive.

Harry Dean (Michael Caine) is an over-confident cockney con-man who having read about Shahbandar thinks he is an easy mark. His recruits streetwise nightclub dancer Nicole Chang (Shirley MacLaine), who bears a striking resemblance to Shahbandar's long dead Eurasian wife as bait to gain access to Shahbandar's apartment. He has it all planned right down to the priceless statue he aims to steal.

The film opens as Dean and an accomplice recruit Chang and we see the whole plan through Dean's eye, Chang is refined and stylish and everything goes to plan, he swings off the Balcony of Shahbandar's apartment with the artefact in the bag.

Of course, this is all in Dean's mind and as soon as he approaches Chang things begin to go wrong. She is streetwise, speaks her mind and talks incessantly; she is certainly not easily kept in check and is constantly distracted by anything and everything.

But his is just the beginning, when they arrive to undertake their carefully planned criminal venture, there is no limousine at the airport, the motel is not what they thought it would be and Shahbandar has them watched as he is more than aware how vulnerable he may be to a trickster using a lookalike for his dead wife to get through the door.

The plot is complex and twists and turns into every which way, soon we realize that Chang is not as stupid as she seems and may actually be the key to the success of the plan.

There is so much to like about this film. Michael Caine as the truly arrogant Harry Dean who is convinced he can transform himself from a cockney crook into a refined Englishman well enough to fool one of the world's richest men is marvellous. MacLaine as Chang is superbly amusing and the chemistry between them creates a romantic element which adds to the spice of the film. The script is tight and the dialogue is filled with dry and witty humour.

It is surprising to think this has not been available on DVD before and the edition from Second Sight is excellent. It offers an extremely clear print in 2:35/16.9 anamorphic widescreen and the DD 2.0 track is as clear as a well.

### Star Stories (2006) Series 1 Hopscotch R4

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

Star Stories is one of the new breed of British comedy – savagely satirical, a sense of the ridiculous, and dedicated to deflating pomposity. It takes the stories of the media-inflated “stars” and gives them a thorough lampooning. Some of these shows must verge on libel.

The cast of actors is wide ranging and skilful and they get the quirks and mannerisms of their characters down perfectly. Each little personality trait is brought out, exaggerated and ridiculed.

The makeup is incredible and makes most of the characters immediately recognizable. I will never be able to look at Tom Cruise in a movie the same way again, let alone Nicole Kidman.

Some of their victims must have thought about legal action. Tom Cruise explaining scientology would have given the show's lawyers a few bad moments, as would the Britney Spears / Christine Aguilera episode. Walt Disney should be coming out of his cryogenic suspension to sue them for the way he is depicted as a ranting Nazi. Even Colonel Sanders of fried chicken fame gets a serve and Justin Timberlake seems unsure if he is Michael Jackson. No one is safe.

Simon Cowell, host of British talent shows, is perhaps the worst done by. His episode makes him out to be a narcissistic homosexual backstabbing money-hungry murderer, as well as a self-promoting would-be genius. The show's actors change from episode to episode but there are classic performances given by such well-knowns as Rhys Thomas, Rosalyn Wright and Steve Edge.

It's hard to say much more about the show because it's so visual. It's gross, vicious, funny, politically incorrect and dreadfully unkind to hardworking “celebrities”. It's absolutely great, in fact.

I can't help comparing this show with one we previously reviewed in Synergy, Snuffbox. It follows on nicely to Snuffbox's antihero style. There is the same irreverence and the humour is just as wrong.





**The Boy God  
(Roco, ang batang bato)  
Trash Palace  
DVD-R**

The Boy God is a strange and wonderful film directed by J. Erastheo Navoa of the Philippines. Dating from 1983 it combines typical Eighties fantasy film excess with a bizarreness which only bad world cinema can provide.



It is a fantasy adventure based on an “avatar” or god who incarnates into physical form to become a chubby young boy who possesses superhuman powers. He must undertake a mystical quest to the distant land of the dead to free his parents who are undertaking some sort of penance for undisclosed sins. (Perhaps there sin was allowing their son to star in this film!)

The journey is a traditional fantasy quest which involves bizarre and unusual creatures, some of which are helpful, others which the child hero must fight and overcome. He enlists a tribe of “little people” to battle a Cyclops and then must fight a dangerous two headed monster but at least he has the aid of a female superhero to win this battle. There are numerous other battles he must fight including defending a village against vampire like creatures, werewolves and an evil scientist. The climax of the tale involves a totally over the top martial arts and gun battle against an evil scientist and his henchmen. This is a rare and unusual title and Trash Palace once again has found a very reasonable copy which includes the original trailer.

This is one of these so-bad-they-are-good films which has the lowest possible special effects



budget, delusions of grandeur, quirky acting and a script which is indecipherable. The dubbing is hilarious and the film has a truly eccentric charm.

The Boy God is a marvellous example of Filipino cult fantasy cinema and is well worth the price of admission. You will laugh in disbelief from beginning to end.

**Christmas Evil (1980)  
Echelon Films  
Singa Home  
Entertainment**



Christmas Evil aka You Better Watch Out (1980) is a superb example of an Eighties video nasty. Directed by Lewis Jackson, it brings together all manner of perversion and splatter to create a superbly anti-

Christmas work of cinema. If you wonder whether it is dangerous to tell your children lies about Santa Claus then watch this film !

It opens as a number of young boys and their all too nice mother are watching Santa come down the chimney and deliver presents. Later on in the night older of the boys tells the younger one that Santa as actually their father, so he decides to creep down stairs to investigate for himself. He is horrified by what he finds, Santa is eating something from between his mother legs ! Oh my God ! Is his mother having an affair with Santa or is Santa really his Dad and hence he has been deceived. In any events he loses his little mind, smashes a Christmas snow dome and slashes his hands. This is now one seriously screwed-up kid.



Some years later we now meet the disturbed child as Harry Stadling, a very strange adult. He is totally obsessed with Christmas; his house is filled with Christmas items, he wakes up in the morning to a Christmas clock and does his exercises to Christmas music. He works at Jolly Toys and regular lectures the other workers on the importance of Christmas and the beauty of toys. When he is elevated to management he is viewed with suspicion by the other workers and treated with thinly veiled contempt.

He spends a large part of his spare time watching the local children with his binoculars documenting their behaviour in two large books marked bad and good. The scenes where he is watching the local kids and recording what they do is truly creepy.

He begins to get more and more unstable and identifies himself with Santa Claus. At Christmas Eve this year he has to decide who has been naughty and who has been nice and along the way bring some discipline to any adults who haven't lived up to his strict moral code.

The first half of the film is very disturbed and



weird, Stadling is superbly insane with his Christmas obsession and the film builds and builds and builds, you know he will explode but you are just not sure when. Of course as Christmas Eve hits, then the film moves into slasher mode and the action hits the screen. At the same time there is a tragic aspect to Stadling, his is an adult-child who has never grown up, he still sees the world in simple terms and somehow still believes in Santa, even if Santa happens to be himself.

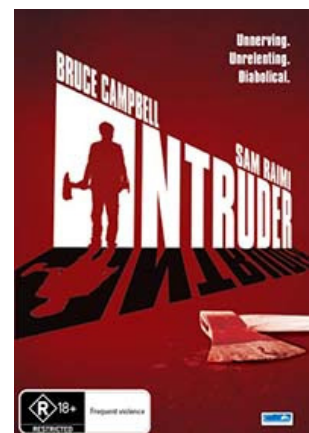
The film also has some unusual surreal touches from the way Santa in the opening shots floats back up the chimney to Stadling as Santa flying off in his painted van posing as a sleigh across the moonlight.

Christmas Evil is one of a small range of Christmas horror tales and stands out from the genre in its truly weird subject matter and its mixture of gore, madness and obsession. The edition from Singa has not been restored but is certainly reasonable enough to enjoy.

**Web:** <http://www.singahe.com>

**Intruder:  
Director's Cut  
Big Sky  
Beyond Home  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD**

Some seven years after the success of Evil Dead and a couple after Evil Dead II, Bruce Campbell and Sam Raimi got together on a gory Eighties slasher.



Co-written and directed by the original co-writer of Evil Dead, Scott Spiegel it certainly brings some flair to the Eighties slasher genre. Including names which would later go onto bigger things, Intruder was for a long-time the video nasty everyone wanted to see. It is now available in an impressive Director's Cut from Big Sky (Australia) and certainly matches gore with a suspense filled storyline.

The film opens with lots of moody cinematography and brooding music. As a local supermarket is closing, an ex-boyfriend of one of the checkout chicks re-appears and causes a major





ruckus. He is just out of jail for accidentally killing a bouncer at a club and certainly lives up to his badboy image by getting into a free-for-all brawl with the staff after assaulting his ex-girlfriend. He flees into the night but they all expect him to return and this is not helped by his obsessive phone calling. It is reported to the police who are noteworthy in their incompetence.

This is just the beginning of a bad night for the staff. They are informed that the supermarket will be closing at the end of the month and they are all going to be laid off. They are invited to spend the night discount pricing the stock to make some extra dollars. As they go about their jobs, flirting, drinking beer and trying to make the best of a bad situation something doesn't seem quite right.

As the night wears on they are picked off one-by-one, being a supermarket there are lots of exciting and interesting ways to die from death by a hydraulic box squasher, to a band saw, from a hammer and a big knife to an office paper holder strategically rammed into the eye socket. The gore is high, realistic and loads of fun; it is what



you would expect from an Eighties video nasty. At first we are convinced it is the evil ex-boyfriend, but that seems too simple doesn't it. Sure he may be obsessive and a bit quick with his fists but does this make him a mad killer who slaughters with glee and abandon, probably not. The revelation of the killer is not especially unexpected, though it is a nice twist.

Intruder has excellent special effects and the killings still look realistic even though it was made twenty years, the acting is credible and there are some excellent set pieces. The cinematography is inventive and takes what is essentially a dull supermarket and makes it threatening and nerve wracking, there is a good use of shadow and reflection and some excellent scenes using the basement, butchery and packing room.

I like Intruder; I think it offers something a little unusual when it comes to a fairly overdone genre, the Slasher. It is inventive, has excellent characters and lots of gore.



## Night of the Demon (1980)

DVDR

Trash Palace

Night of the Demon (1980) is one of the strangest bigfoot movies ever made. Released in the middle of the Video Nasties craze it was originally banned in Germany, Norway and the UK. In 1994 it was granted an '18' rating (U.K.) but cut by 1 minute 41 seconds. The DVD-R from Trash Palace is the uncut edition.

While this film may follow in the tradition of Bigfoot films such as the Abominable Snowman and The Legend of Boggy Creek, it moves the film into a modern setting adds lots of tits, sex and gore and creates something which is truly unique. This may be a film marked by bad acting and a low budget, but don't let that turn you off, this is one of those truly excessive cult horror films you just really cannot miss.

Professor Nugent is the only survivor of a mass slaughter, five of his students are dead and he has terrible injuries to his face. He awakens in a hospital and tries to explain to the rather sceptical policeman at the end of his bed what happened. The film is essentially told via flash-backs.

Professor Nugent works at a local college and wants to make a name for himself. After reading numerous reports of a bigfoot or Yeti in the local forest (with related brutal murders) he decides to investigate. He finds the authorities have been covering-up the crimes and the university refuses to back his expedition. Accordingly, against all advice, he puts together a group of his students and off they go on a quest for the bigfoot.

This may sound all pretty average but this is a very strange tale. The bigfoot seems very human in oh so many ways; he does strange



things to a naked male on the top of a car, pulls off a biker's dick, scratches deeply into a man's back while he makes out with his partner, rapes a young girl and seems to have the intelligence to use axes, knives and other weapons as required. He looks like a man in a ape suit and probably is !

This film also has many elements akin to a conventional slasher, you know when the young ins start making-out they are going to get it. Since the death of the team are not enough to fill the film with perversity and gore, we get enactments as the Professor retells the killings attributed to the creature by the media. These are gloriously exploitative, violent and allow all manner of excess. From fisherman to school-girls, the tales of slaughter are retold with abandon.

The first half of the film is primarily filled with these stories and the exploration of the woods, the stage is also set as they come across a group of inbred locals about to undertake some sort of "Yeti folk" rite involving the rape of a Wanda, a local girl.

As we move into the last half it is then that the team gets in real trouble. When they meet Wanda, they decide to hypnotize her to uncover her story. Soon we hear a tale of religious excess, child abuse, her rape by the Yeti and lots more. Of course they are now in very dangerous territory, Wanda is the love interest of Bigfoot and he is about to come and pay a visit.

This is one of those strange cross genre films where exploitation meets creature-feature, slasher horror meets cult. It is a truly ridiculous and fun romp. The uncut edition from Trash Palace offers a good print, clear sound and comes with some related cult film trailers.





**Puppet Master**  
Big Sky Films  
Beyond Home  
Entertainment  
All Region PAL

Charles Brand is a prolific cult film producer and one of his most successful series has been the Puppet Master films.

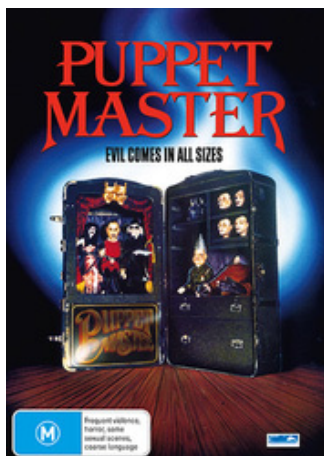
The original film which started it all was Puppet Master and dates from 1989. It is an unusual cult/horror film which combines a B grade sensibility with a strange and wonderful set of weird characters. It has moderate gore, a twisted plot and some truly awesome puppets.

The special effects are stop motion and are little dated but are certainly a lot of fun. There are some strange moments such as a slashed throat that does not bleed and a horny puppet and that oozes slugs from her mouth they all add to the weirdness of the tale.

The film opens as Toulon, a puppet maker, is breathing life into a new puppet. He has a strange and wonderful family of living puppets which include Blade, Jester, Leech Woman, Pin Head, and Tunneler.

Tunneler has a nasty habit of boring holes into people's flesh with his drill bit head; Leech Woman is a sexy puppet who regurgitates killer leeches which suck her victims dry.

Pin Head strangles his victims with his powerful vice-like hands; Blade has a gleaming hook for one hand and a razor-sharp knife for the other



and Jester, the brains and meanest of the bunch

It seems he has mastered the ability to bring puppets to life and this ability is desired by the Nazis. To stop them getting their hands on his knowledge he hides his puppets behind a wall and commits suicide.

Years later a team of psychics who have worked together on various projects answer a psychic call from Neil Gallagher to meet him at an isolated resort. When they arrive they find he has died but they all are plagued with odd feelings and strange dreams. The characters are all unusual from Dana the bitchy white witch with her stuffed dog to the psychic couple who used wild sex to stimulate their abilities. There is also Alex Whittaker, a dream psychic and academic.

As they settle in for Neil's funeral weird events occur, Neil's body seems to move itself in and out of its coffin and the maid has gone missing.

Things begin to take a turn for the worse; one by one the psychics are attacked and killed by Toulon's puppets which are now under Neil's control. It seems Neil did commit suicide but then used the "Ancient Egypt puppet masters magic" to bring himself back from the dead. He needs to kill everyone who is psychically linked to him in case they try and steal his secret knowledge.

While he is now immortal he can be killed but only if his body is hacked and destroyed.

The film climaxes as Neil "resurrects" and just as he thinks he has it made, he makes the fateful mistake of dismissing his puppets. Now they are out for revenge and soon he will taste their fury.

The DVD from Big Sky includes a commentary, featurette and trailer.



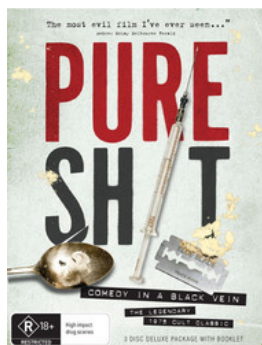
**Pure Shit**  
**3 DVD Special**  
**Edition**  
**Beyond Home**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

Heroin addiction may be a scourge that destroys the lives it touches but for those of us who have not experienced it, coming to appreciate the suffering it causes can be difficult. *Pure Shit* attempts to communicate the experience of drug addiction with an honesty which is brutal, confronting and poignant. It was a film which caused scandal when released and has not seen the light of day on video or DVD since. It was banned and slammed by the media and establishment of the time.

It is amusing to think that part of the controversy was over the title ! It was originally banned altogether and then given an R Rating only if its title was changed to Pure S.

*Pure Shit* is unusual on many levels; it was made on a miniscule budget of \$28,000 which was provided by a combination of the Australia Council and the Buoyancy Foundation which works to assist addicts. The script was written by junkies themselves and from stories told by a wide selection of clients of the Buoyancy Foundation and hence it has a gritty realism not found in many other films on the subject. It is also, surprisingly, filled with black humour.

It was made on 16mm, filmed over four weekends and hardly made a cent when released. Yet if the truth be known it changed the way addiction is represented on screen forever, here was a honest portrayal of heroin addiction without social commentary or moralism. The sheer



audacity of such a film in the Seventies cannot really be appreciated today.

*Pure Shit* is an account of a day in the life of four smack addicts looking for a fix. In the space of 48 hours, a friend dies of an overdose, they are ripped off by criminals and arrested and assaulted by police

The film was developed by a combination of a working script combined with improvisation. It is an edgy and powerful film and at the time (1975) caused a very explosive reaction with the media, Andrew Mckay from the Melbourne Herald even called the film 'the most evil film I've ever seen'.

The film stars John Laurie, Carol Porter, Gary Waddell and Anne Hetherington as the junkies, with appearances by writer Helen Garner, future comedian Greg Pickhaver (who became H.G. Nelson) and satirist Max Gillies as a doctor.

Beyond Home Entertainment have done an amazing job making available this very rare film in a special edition. It has been fully restored print by the National Film and Sound Archive with the original soundtrack by Martin Armiger (The Sports) and featuring Red Symons (Skyhooks). It includes a 16 page booklet, Director & Actors Commentary, Interviews: cast crew & celebrity guests, Mini Featurettes: 'Pure Shit Reunion' 'Rollin' with Bert and Gaz', Stills gallery and an OZ Rock Soundtrack CD.

This is a significant work of Australian cinema which is marked by a frankness and a dark sense of humour. It is marvellous to see it restored and available in such a high quality package.





**Stephen Romano  
Presents  
Shock Festival  
Bloody Earth Pictures  
R1 3 DVD Set**

Stephen Romano is an artist and author obsessed with cult, grind-house and genre cinema. Since his youth he has created his own unique genre cinema posters for films he wished had been made but never were. These posters took on a life of their own and gave birth to the alternate universe documented in *Shock Festival* (IDW 2008), a book which includes not only his stunning art, but a stories where faux films, directors and characters are weaved together into a B movie extravaganza. There are over 100 movies and a slew of filmmaker and actors who never existed, all documented in incredible detail.

As a companion to the book, but also just enjoyable by itself, this three DVD Shock Festival is every cult cine aficionados dream.

The DVD collection includes three DVDs packed with over seven hours of the most bi-



zarre exploitation, horror and B Grade cinema trailers you will ever see. They have been nicely restored with improved picture quality and excellent sound.

The first DVD opens with a series of faux trailers based on tales from the book. They are rip-roaring fun and can also be viewed with a commentary by Stephen Romano. The second reel is an awesome series of exploitation trailers. Some of the films are so utterly insane that it is hard to believe they are real when the faux titles based on Shock Festival are not !

The second DVD opens with a horror trailer marathon which offers everything from Giallo and gore to cult and classic horror. It then follows with the TV Spectacular which are quite amazing TV trailers with commentaries by Stephen Romano and Uncle Creepy.

We are then treated to a selection of trailers from Independent International Pictures with Sam Sherman including a very informative interview with him on his work in B grade and cult cinema, from advertising and promoting genre cinema to making it. The third reel on this DVD is a new gallery of Shock Festival posters with accompanying music.

The third DVD opens a new world of trailers, that of radio spots and music. It is a veritable goldmine of over 300 radio spots remastered from rare original vinyl records. The mp3's are high quality and encoded with images of the films. There is also a rather neat tribute score from Mars Deadhouse Music.

The package also include an informative full colour insert booklet and poster.

**Web:** <http://www.alternativecinema.com>





**Yatterman**  
**Bonzai Media Corp**  
**All Region NTSC**

Yatterman is an eccentric fantasy film from Japanese film legend Takashi Miike, it is based on the Anime series from Tatsuo Yoshida but is presented as a live action rather than Anime film. It is a truly bizarre experience which crosses all sorts of genre boundaries.



The question which came to mind as I watched it was what sort of audience is this aimed at? On one level it is a kid's film, but much like The Great Yokai War by Miike, he has placed enough adult elements to make it a great watch for adults as well. Doronjo, the evil femme fatale looks like a bondage queen, her offsider Boyacky dreams of having all the schoolgirls in Japan piled into one mountain and one of their "Mecha" weapons is a gigantic robotic woman who shoots war heads out of her breasts while screaming "I'm coming" and is only destroying when Mecha ants bite her nipples off; not the sort of thing you would see in more staid Australian or United States children's films.

The original anime series Yatterman ran from 1977 to 1979. The series had some one hundred eight episodes and was one of Japan's most popular series. In 2008, thirty years after the original, the series was revived and in 2009 Takashi Miike made this feature to celebrate the film. Miike, however, is known for his dark, if not perverse, sense of humour and hence Miike takes the Yatterman series and subverts it including all sorts of strange subplots, adult imagery and a truly wicked sense of humour.

It is quite a visually overpowering film with astounding special effects, a super-fast paced storyline and very quirky and unusual cinematography. There are factoids explaining various scenes in the films, giant robots (Mechas), an Indiana Jones like story, superheroes and lots of lots of strangeness.

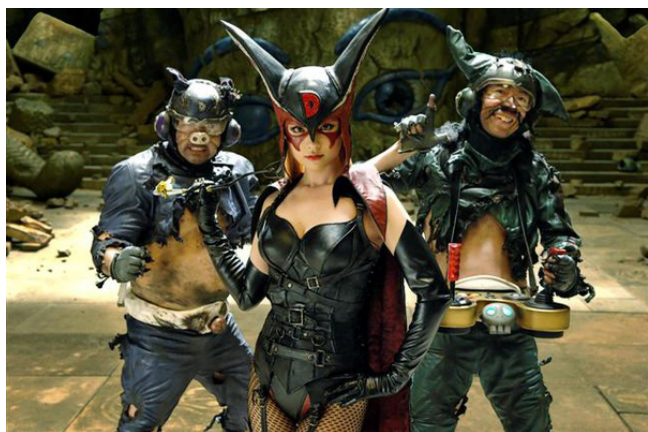


Gan, the son of the owner of Takada Toy Shop, and his girlfriend, Ai are inseparable and form the nexus of the Yatterman superhero team. Together they have created a huge Mecha, Yatterwoof, a dog-shaped robot and a range of smaller robots with which they battle evil. Their adversary is Doronjo, the leatherclad femme fatale who leads the Doronbow gang with robot maker Boyacky and henchman Tonzra.

The gangs are brought together in conflict when Skullobey tricks the Doronjo team into searching for the four pieces of the Skull Stone, which when combined become a mystic device to control time. Yatterman are joined by the daughter of an archaeologist who has been seeking to protect the stone pieces.

As battle mounts against battle, the Mechas get bigger, the stakes get larger and the total insanity of the Yatterman film becomes a truly unique cinematic experience.

Sadly, Yatterman is not generally available, the Bonzai Media version is available online from Asian Cult Cinema at <http://www.asiancult.com>



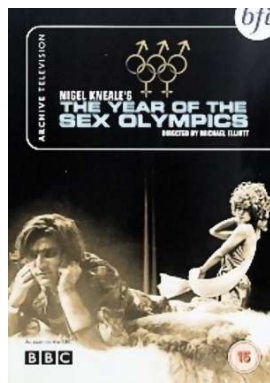


# SEX IN SPACE !!

## Sex and Science Fiction Cinema

The depiction of sexuality in science fiction has a long and varied history, from Rotwang's creation of Hel the machine woman in *Metropolis* (1927), to Pris, the basic pleasure model in *Blade Runner* (1982). More explicit sex in science fiction is hard to find and it is generally believed that *Barbarella* (1968) opened the floodgates to more creative explorations of sex within the science fiction genre. I do use the term "creative" loosely here as some of the films are "so bad they are good" and others are well, just plain awful. However since we are covering science fiction cinema I thought it would be fun to delve into the backwaters of the genre and see what I could come up with.

*The Year of the Sex Olympics* (1968) is one of the rarer science fiction sex films. Produced by the BBC and denounced by Mary Whitehouse and her moral crusaders, it is a fascinating film exploring sex, science fiction and media. While certainly not an "adult title" its subject matter is significant enough to warrant discussing.



In the future television has replaced activity, violence and sex is provided as a diet to replace consumption.

Sex is not to do, sex is to watch; however the population are becoming restless regardless of how much content is provided to them. Soon a worker on the "Artsex" show is beginning to feel something reawakening; he remembers what the old days used to be like.



With encouragement from others who feel that sex needs to be "real" when Potter participates in "The Live-Life Show" a *Big-Brother* type reality TV program events may turn in a truly unexpected direction.

*2069: A Sex Odyssey* (1969) is a softcore science fiction sex romp. It is set in a quiet little West German township in the Alps which is suddenly invaded by a spacecraft of Venusian astronauts primed and ready for action. These sexy space ladies are clad in silver outfits and have a truly significant mission. They must collect enough semen to keep Venus fertile for the next 10,000 years.



*Sleeper* (1973) A science fiction comedy by Woody Allen. In this comedy Allen lands in cryogenic suspension and is woken up 200 years in the future. In this future world all men are impotent, except those of Italian descent !

The sex toy of choice is an Orgasmatron booth where a single phone call triggers sexual bliss.



*Flesh Gordon* (1974) while somewhat trite and silly today, broke new ground at the time and still works as a sex parody of the original Flash Gordon (1936). Indeed it would be fair to say that it only really works if you have seen the original.

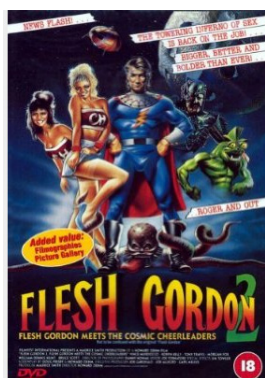
The evil and ever horny Emperor Wang aims a "Sex Ray" at the Earth from his home world of Porno. Planet Earth becomes uncontrollably sexually obsessed and it is up to Flesh Gordon to save the day.

Along with his girlfriend Dale Ardent and Professor Flexi-Jerkoff, they set off towards the source of the Sex Ray, unaware of the perils that face them including the rather camp Great God Porno who is brought out of hibernation by Emperor Wang.

The film packed in as much nudity as it could and was loaded with ridiculous innuendo.

It was followed by the less successful *Flesh Gordon Meets the Cosmic Cheerleaders* in 1989.

*Beast in Space* (1980) aka *La bestia nello spazio* is a strange and truly outrageously B grade Italian cult film. *La Bete* (*The Beast*) (1975) had been a Euro cult success and so for some insane reason it was decided to play off its success and create a version set in space! It was released in both an R Rated and X Rated edition; the X Rated footage was filmed totally separate using different actors and added into the film later.

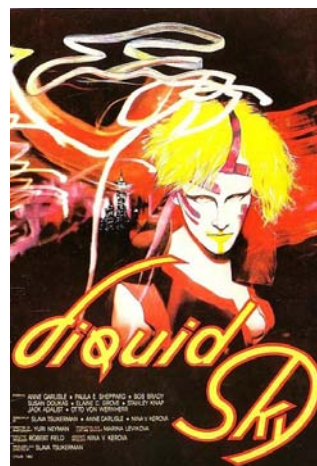


As factions on earth battle against each other for supremacy in space, one element is in constant demand since it can be used to make a neutron bomb. Space captain Larry Madison is leading a mission to a planet which is abundant in minerals.

He is a bit of a rough nut spending his free time enjoying anonymous sex and drinking. One of the crew is Lt. Sondra Richardson (Shirpa Lane), who is haunted by nightmares of a huge, beast-like man ravishing her.

As they land on the planet they uncover a dark secret. The planet is controlled by a sentient computer whose sole desire is to unleash the hidden lusts of everyone who visits the planet. Along the way Lt. Sondra Richardson also comes head on with the beast of her dreams. A restored edition of this truly bizarre film (in both R and X Rated versions) has been released from Severin Films.

*Liquid Sky* (1983) is an indie cult-classic where bisexual, cocaine-addicted fashion model Margaret has a gang of tiny aliens tailing her and sucking up the endorphins in the form of crystals from anybody she has sex with. Why do they do it? Because for these aliens endorphins are fuel!!



This certainly makes life awkward for Margaret since she must hide all the mounting pile of bodies, but soon the aliens come to appreciate her dilemma and start vaporizing them for her. Margaret wonders why she isn't killed until she comes to understand that it is because she never has an orgasm.

Realising the alien spaceship is about to leave Margaret injects herself with heroin and induces a wild orgasm via masturbation so she can leave with the aliens.

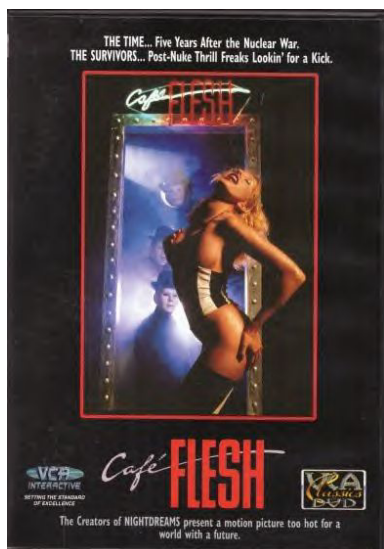


### *Café Flesh*

(1982) is considered the very first explicit mass market science fiction sex film. It was a post-apocalyptic film which was released in both a softcore R Rated edition and an explicit XXX edition. It was funded by a careful ruse where the science fiction elements were shown to financiers and the sex elements filmed separately. It was directed by Stephen Sayadian (under the pseudonym Rinse Dream), co-written by Sayadian and Jerry Stahl. The score was professional, composed and produced by noted musician Mitchell Froom.

This was the period of new wave and the film was a strange mix of science fiction, dark humour, satire and sex. It is an unusual film in that as a softcore movie it was quite successful in mainstream cinema, yet made its name as an innovative hardcore film which was surprisingly professional in cinematography and plot.

Nuclear weapons have made 99% of the population sterile, they have become known as the Sex Negatives. The remaining one percent of Sex Positives are required by law to perform public sex acts for the benefit of the frustrated populace. The central focus of these performances is a nightclub called "Cafe Flesh" where the Negatives are entertained by sex and an MC known as Max Melodramatic.



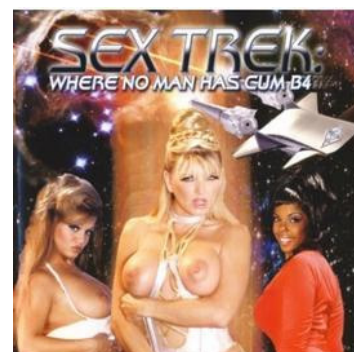
One Sex Negative couple are having an especially difficult time. Nick and Lana love the shows at Cafe Flesh but every time Nick tries to make out with Lana he is physically sick. Lana, however, has an added problem; she is Sex Positive and hiding the fact from Nick and those around her. Even though she loves Nick she is becoming fed up with him becoming ill ever time they try and have a bit of fun and is becoming more and more excited by the sex on show at Cafe Flesh.

*Cafe Flesh* is a very unusual adult film, brimming with cutting dialogue (Max Melodramatic is superbly vindictive), a bizarre plot and lots of sex.

Two sequels, *Cafe Flesh 2* and *Cafe Flesh 3*, were released in 1997 and 2003, directed by Antonio Passolini, but did not achieve the cult status of the first film.

### *Sex Trek* (1990)

The crew has found life on the planet Uranus. The inhabitants are discovered to be assholes: a bean-eating, bad-smelling, sex-hungry form of female humanoids.



As representatives of the human race, the earthlings set off to exploit Uranus and its inhabitants. Sadly there were numerous sequels.

*Latex and Shock* (1995). Michael Ninn's most famous adult films, *Latex* and its sequel *Shock* are quirky cyberpunk science fiction adult tiles



which certainly challenge and entertain. *Latex* (1995) is the tale of a rather disturbed man who believes he can read people's souls and uncover their deep and darkest sexual desires. Set in a future dystopia it is horny as well as weird. *Shock* (1995) continues the tale and offers an impressively complex adult cyberpunk story.



*Cyberella: Forbidden Passions* (1996) is the tale of Mara who is a famous virtual reality designer. She dies in a fire but luckily for her she is still plugged into her virtual reality system. She escapes the afterlife but lands in some sort of cyberworld where she happens to meet God. God explains to her that to transcend this cyber prison she must enter other virtual reality worlds, meet people of various shapes, sizes and sexes and have sex with them. It is science fiction adult cinema, but of very low quality.



*Orgazmo* (1998) was a film developed by Trey Stone of South Park fame. It is all about Joe Young, a young and dumb Mormon missionary. After nearly getting killed when he knocks on the door of a mob porn maker he ends up starring in a porn film to cover his upcoming wedding bills. The film is *Orgazmo* and is about a superhero with a difference, he fights crime with sex using his Orgazmorator and with the help of ChodaBoy, his sidekick. Joe soon finds himself in real trouble when not

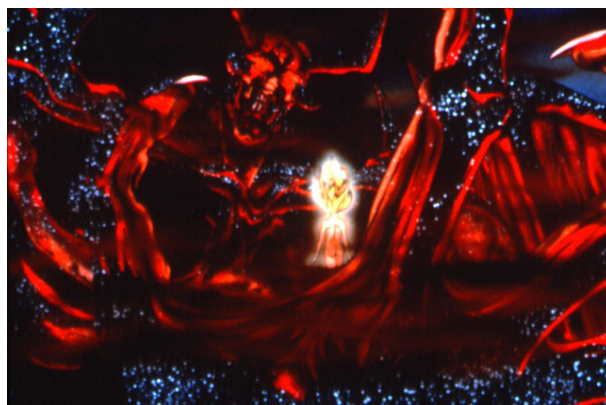


only does the movie become a hit but he finds that ChodaBoy has created a real Orgazmorator!

An unusual sub genre within the "sex and science fiction" field is known as shoku-shu goukan or tentacle sex. It is a form of Hentai (explicit Anime) in which monsters with tentacles penetrate women with their oversized appendages. It is generally believed this genre developed as Japan has fairly strict laws regarding the showing of actual erections and hence penetration by a phallic like tentacle was a way to circumvent the law.



A classic example is *Urotsukidōji* aka *Legend of the Overfiend* from the late Eighties and its various sequels. While the content may have circumvented laws in Japan, it was not so lucky overseas, it was heavily censored on release in the US, UK and Australia. Uncut DVD releases of the series are only available in the US.





**Truck Stop 1975**  
**French Erotica**  
**Overdubbed in English**  
**Le Chat Qui Fume**  
**MVD**  
**R1 DVD**

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

We have looked at some of Director Jean-Marie Pallardy's films before as part of the Classics of French Erotica series. From a rather rough but promising start with *My Body Burns* his work was becoming very slick and professional, with lovely actresses, pretty good acting and a plot of sorts.

Unfortunately this film loses the plot a little. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that it just doesn't have much of a plot so it is disjointed and has gaps you could drive a truck through. Although it is supposedly based on Homer's *Odyssey* the connection is pretty loose.

The film opens promisingly enough with Jeff and Eugene driving through the desert. Jeff has taken a wrong turn somewhere and he is lost. He stops for a rest and sees a mirage of three attractive young ladies beckoning him with promises of sexual favours. He wanders off into the desert under their spell where he is found later by Eugene. Now they are both lost.

JoJo (with an improbable moustache) and John are truck drivers. They find out about a local truck drivers inn where the food is good and the waitresses are easy on the eye, or just easy anyway. The owner is Pamela, Eugene's girlfriend. He has been lost in the desert now for some time and the truckers are all trying to take his

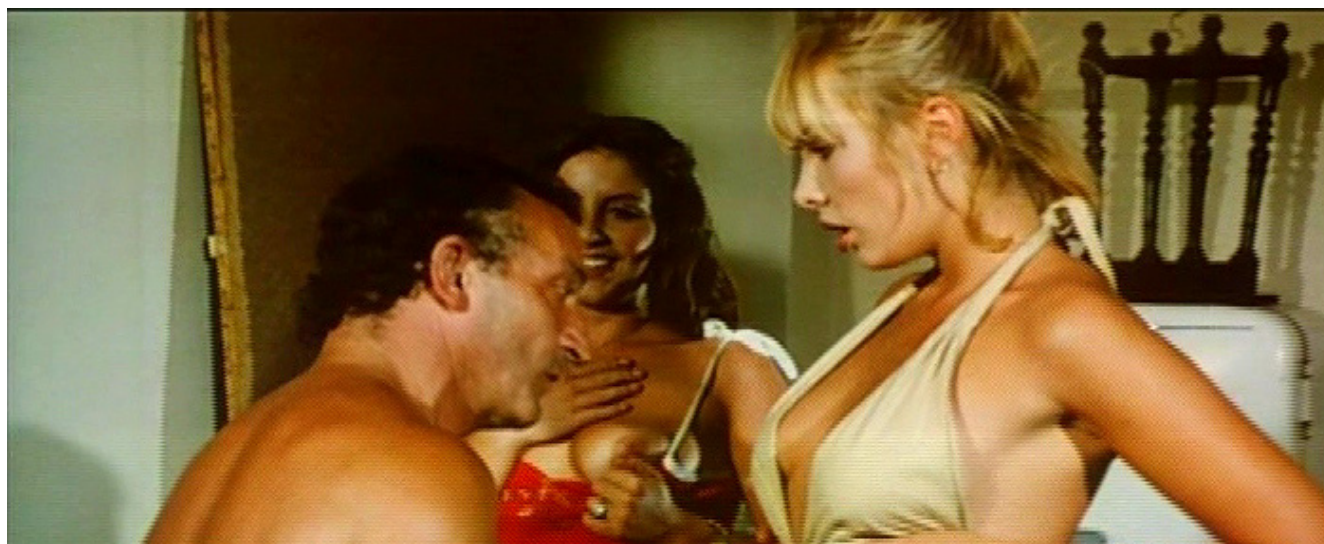
place. Pamela is under a lot of pressure but she remains true to Eugene.

Eugene, meanwhile, is trapped in a desert oasis with a nubile young lady, Calypso, who is keeping him as a sex slave. He has everything he could want except Pamela. Finally she agrees to let him go, knowing he can never be hers. He and Jeff then must fight and bonk their way back to Pamela. Their truck is conveniently where they left it nearly a year ago and never seems to run out of fuel although Eugene and Jeff must steal food to keep going.

Pallardy made the film as a light comedy with erotic content, as for his previous films. In this one the comedy seems more forced, often dropping into farce and slapstick, and the sex scenes are more gratuitous. The women are lovely but that doesn't save the film from being much less than it could have been.

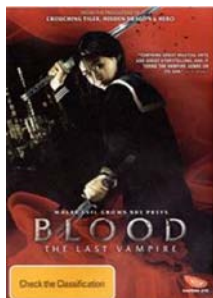
Technically it is generally OK for an early film but there is an annoying glitch in the sound where the two channels drop back to mono occasionally.

The extras include trailers for other Pallardy films, *The Erotic Journal of Jean-Marie Pallardy*, and another hundred photos of his leading ladies from his collection.



**Blood:  
The Last Vampire  
2009  
Madman  
R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich



Just when you thought vampire films had reached their limit and degenerated into a formula (just as zombie films have) along comes one with an original plot and is a long way from the vampire stereotype. This time the Japanese have adapted the vampire into their own culture and the results are excellent.

The film goes back to an anime comic series that was hugely popular in Japan. Its concept was from Mamoru Oshii, the director of *Ghost In The Shell*. In 2000 it was turned into an animated film that was also well received. Unfortunately the Japanese culture and background made the film a little difficult to follow for Western viewers, so this new live remake has been issued. It keeps the basic concept of the earlier film but adds an American flavour to it that should make it more comprehensible.

Saya is a young (400 year old) "halfling", a cross between a human father and a vampire mother. She appears to be around sixteen. The vampires were at war with vampire demons known as "bloodsuckers". These have vampire characteristics but can change shape back to their native form at will.

Most of the good vampires have been killed off over the centuries and Saya is the last true vampire left except for Origen, the nominal head of the bloodsuckers and Saya's ultimate target. The demons are now among us in human form (most of the time) and regard humans as a food crop. Saya works for an unspecified U.S. government agency called The Council that is trying to rid the world of these killer demons. She has become an able swordswoman. In return for her services they also supply her with the blood that her vampire condition needs. Generally they can take it from her victims.



She is sent to the U.S. Kanto Air Force Base posing as a school student. There have been suspicious deaths here and the Council wants the base cleaned up. The Vietnam war is starting and security at the base with its B52 bombers is critical. The Council's suspicions are well founded. Two of the American girl students are demons and Saya slaughters them in the school gym as they are about to kill another student. The student is the rebellious daughter of the base commander. Now she has seen the demons in action she has become a target – the last thing they want is for their food to become aware of their existence. Saya once again saves her from a massed demon attack and the two girls start to form a bond of friendship – the first friendship in Saya's lonely life for a long time..

One of the Council staff believes that more decisive action is required. He feels that Saya may not be needed in the coming war against the demons. He kills Saya's control agent and Saya in turn kills him. The demons attack the base and the girls escape. They are now being hunted by the military, the police, the demons and the Council.

Americanising the film seems to have helped to make it more comprehensible. It is a pity they could not find a more original Council than the traditional "Men In Black", though. Unfortunately on the review copy we received there are large parts of the dialogue that are still in Japanese. I think they probably contain the parts that fill in the background of the story. The film will be better when these have been translated and subtitled. Otherwise the film is good, the acting is good and the swordfights, though rather drawn out, are well done. The CGI demons are brilliant. There are surprises at the end, too, and the story has obviously been left open for a sequel.

*Blood: The Last Vampire* is in Japanese with English subtitles.





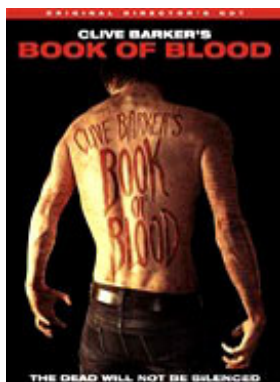
**Clive Barker's Book of Blood**  
Lionsgate  
R1 DVD

Clive Barker has, for many years, been at the cutting edge of modern horror. From his earliest books, *Books of Blood*, through *Hellraiser* to the more recent *Midnight Meat Train*, he has always explored dark territories where many would fear to tread.

As covered in our Halloween feature on Barker's books and cinema he is a truly talented artiste producing works in poetry and prose, art, film and moving between genres such as horror and fantasy, even producing fantasy books for children.

The work which brought Barker international acclaim was *Books of Blood*, this was a series of books which united short tales with an overarching plot. The structure of the work hinged on a young man who was part con-man part psychic. He was recruited by a parapsychologist investigating a supposedly haunted house. What neither of them realised is that the dead have highways and byways through which they move and this premises is a "hot point" between the worlds. When Simon McNeal tries to bluff his way through their work the dead take their revenge by writing their tales on his body.

The film loosely follows the book as well as fleshing out the tale with elements from *On Jerusalem Street*, the postscript to the final volume of the *Books of Blood*. The film offers a fascinating and gruesome visual exploration of the tale as McNeal's body becomes the palette on which the spirits communicate and Mary Florescu, the parapsychologist, a flawed scientist, compromised by her personal ambition and personal attraction to McNeal allows the situation to get out of control.



As with all of Barker's works there is a intense mixture of horror and eroticism, in this case revealed in the illicit affair between Mary and Simon and the way in which his beautiful youthful body is slowly turned into a scarred record of the stories of the dead. This union of eroticism and horror, a dangerous relationship and other-worldly threats works extremely well. The finale is suitably powerful and the depiction of the intersection between worlds and the many spirits which cross it is superbly portrayed.

This is an impressive adaptation of Barker's work offering a top class ghost story which is expressed through a constant sense of dread. The film uses the very latest in special effects and CGI and hence when gore is needed it is certainly used in an innovative and challenging manner. The cinematography is moody and gothic used muted tones and the dark and eerie environs of Edinburgh.

*Clive Barker's Book of Blood* is supposedly the first adaptation from Barker's original *Books of Blood* series; if this is any indication of the quality and creativity then we will be in for some marvellous horror cinema.

The next film adaptation is "*Dread*" and Three students are working on a documentary about what others dread in life, but are unaware that their partner is haunted by his parents' murder and wants to learn more about dread in real life scenarios.



**Dead Set (2009)**  
**Madman**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

My first reaction to this DVD was "not another bloody zombie film". Well, yes, it featured all the stereotype characters – the vacuous blonde, the fat chick, the socially challenged nerd, the grating little bastard who manages to annoy everyone. It had one or two things that made it different and promised something better than average. Then after thirty minutes I realised it was a TV series. How do you spin out a standard zombie show into a TV series? By fleshing out the characters, so to speak.

We start in a TV studio running a Big Brother-style reality show. It is eviction night and there is a huge crowd gathered to see who will be the unlucky one. The blonde girl gets the eviction and there is a lovely performance as she tearfully leaves the house, then pulls herself together, puts on a huge smile, and heads out into the studio to face her new life of fame and fortune as a Big Brother failure. The sheer insincerity of it all is breathtaking and Kathleen McDermott does it beautifully. At this point I realised that the acting was a bit better than average.

Meanwhile in the control room things are falling apart. It is "Family and Friends" night for the contestants, but a car carrying one of the guests is held up by traffic snarls and a road crash. The driver is attacked by a zombie. Back in the studio the news preview cuts in with reports of people rioting across the country and it is evident the zombie plague has spread like lightning. Patrick, the producer, doesn't care. He is arrogant and overbearing and just wants his show to succeed. Andy Nyman plays the part so well that after a while I was hoping the zombies



would get him next.

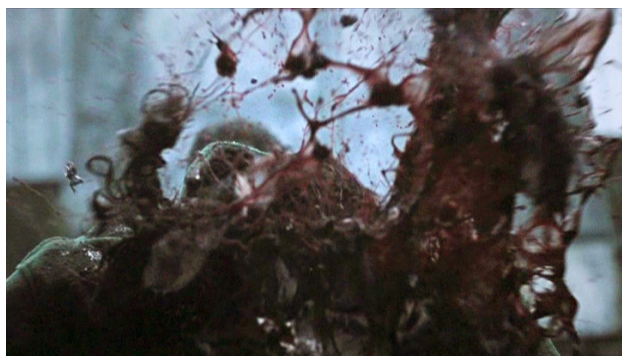
The zombies invade the studio and start attacking and eating people, as zombies do. Even the zombies are better than average – they can run, not shamle along, and this makes them much more dangerous. Fortunately they can't climb fences or open gates. One survivor is Kelly (Jaime Winstone). She is a downtrodden production assistant whose ex-boyfriend is in the missing car. She is in the thick of the zombie attack.

Of course, as soon as the first zombie appears the phones, trains, TVs and radios automatically fail (Why? The power is still on). The survivors trapped in the studio are completely cut off. The Big Brother contestants have a good night's sleep, unaware that the world outside is in chaos, then awake to continue their bickering. I loved the way that the "Reality TV" show is completely out of touch with reality. The house is a pretty good place to avoid the zombies as it has excellent security. Kelly breaks into the house and the contestants realise that all is not well outside their unreal little world.

The survivors gradually come together in the house and each one's personality changes as the situation becomes worse. The entire compound is surrounded by zombies and the situation looks grim. Patrick gets worse, if anything, and plots a suicidal escape. The others don't like his plan but can't come up with a better one of their own.

By the end of the series I had completely changed my mind about it. It is well crafted, has good actors and magnificent effects, and despite the conventional plot it still manages to scare the pants off you occasionally. Even the extras are worth watching. The special FX guys are nothing short of amazing.

I I could only have one zombie film on my bookshelf, this would be the one.





**Dead Snow 2009**  
**Madman**  
**R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
 Bob Estreich

First I have to say that this film is cliché-ridden, has no character development and has a predictable but unlikely plot copied from so many other zombie films before it.

That said, though, the film has something else that lifts it above the zombie films that every producer wants to do these days. Perhaps it's the incongruity of the Nazi zombies set against the stunningly beautiful Norwegian mountain scenery. Perhaps it's that the zombies can at least move at a fast pace, can fight as well, and can think and work like a team.

The plot is basic and predictable. A group of students go for an Easter holiday to an isolated cabin in the mountains. One of their number was going to ski in and she is late. On the first night an old man hiking through the area visits them and tells them of a group of evil Nazis and German soldiers who were kicked out of the local village towards the end of the War. They were left to die in the mountains but since then strange things have happened in the area and people have disappeared. Predictably, having served his purpose by giving us the plot, he then goes off to camp in a tent by himself and is messily killed.

The next day the kids are having fun in the snow and their leader goes off on his snowmobile to find the missing girl. He falls through a hole in the snow and finds himself in a series of tunnels that the Germans have built. He is injured badly in the fall into the tunnel and subsequently in a fight with a German soldier zombie, so he patches himself up and next morning returns to the cabin.



Back at the cabin things have not been going so well. One couple has slipped out of the cabin to have sex, so according to convention in these matters they are the next to die. The zombies have attacked the cabin and the carnage has begun. Next morning the students decide they must get out of the cabin. The two remaining girls will go for help while the boys stay behind and arrange a diversion.

Most of the zombies fall for it and there is the compulsory slaughter scene. It is helped by the reappearance of the student on the snowmobile. He has fitted a machine gun that he found in the tunnels onto his snowmobile so he dispatches a satisfying number of zombies. The drawback of this is, of course, that zombies are already dead. At the call of their leader they rise again and the slaughter starts all over. The obligatory chainsaw makes its appearance.

Yes, we have seen all this before. There are even many sly references to other zombie films scattered throughout and the sheer predictability gives the film a touch of humour. What this film offers is a better take on the genre. The cinematography is superb and the wild mountain scenery is a pleasant change from the usual indoors low-budget settings. The makeup is stunning (although the intestines still look like sausages). The subtitling is good although the film doesn't need much dialogue – you know what's going to happen anyway. It's just a really well-made zombie flick and if you feel a need to see another zombie film, this is the one.



**Ossessione (2007)**  
**Echelon Studios**  
**R1 DVD**

*Ossessione* is an enigmatic and ethereal film from French director Guillaume Beylard; the film has a dream-like quality so that even the simplest of scenes seem imbued with mood and atmosphere.

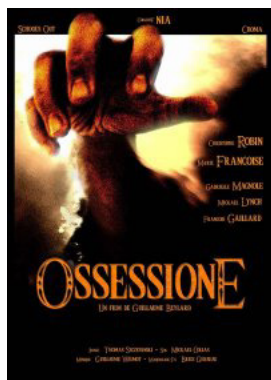
The classical music score is excellent and really sustains the ambience of the film and the beauty of the scenery. The acting is solid and the subtitles are very clear. It is his Beylard's first film, shot on a low budget but with a lot of creativity and sincerity. It has surprisingly superior cinematography which captures the French countryside and its rustic character and the director certainly knows how to use lighting to maximum effect.

Sonia has just inherited a house from her grandmother, it is located in the southwest of France and together with her boyfriend, David, they settle in for the long journey. As they approach the town, they see a bloodied young woman on the road ahead, but when they stop for her she runs off into the bushes. This begins a series of strange events which increase in intensity as they enter the house and Sonia begins to have uncomfortable feelings and hear noises which terrify her. Their encounters with the locals do not help either. Slowly Sonia becomes convinced there is a presence in the house and wants to immediately leave, but David is sceptical of her accounts and convinces her to stay.

However, when Sonia gets kidnapped, David begins to believe something is going on and decides to investigate with the hope of finding his girlfriend. From this point on the film combines fantasy and horror and moves quickly from an atmospheric and moody work of cinema into something more sinister.

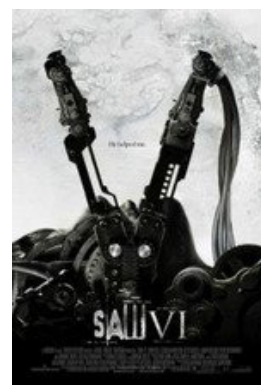
David's investigation leads him to rather bizarre and disturbing characters, some terrifying experiences, unexpected help and a truth from beyond the grave.

While *Ossessione* may be low budget fair, it certainly excels in the creativity department with quite impressive mood, atmosphere and plot. I certainly recommend it.



**Saw VI**  
**Sony**  
**R4 DVD**

The Saw franchise has proved a very unusual entry into the horror genre, bringing together a hard-edged approach to extreme violence and gore with a challenging and intelligent plot.



The franchise began with a simple low budget exploration of just how far someone would go to survive and was the precursor of what many now regard as the new horror genre of "torture porn". (A term which I do not really think does justice to many of the films within this new form of cinema).

As the series continued the figure of Jigsaw became more and more intriguing bringing his own form of vigilante justice to those he saw wasting their lives and worse destroying the lives of others. Even after his death, carefully laid plans continued his legacy and this brings us to Saw VI.

Sequels are always difficult with successful horror films and when I came to part six, I wondered what new ideas could be brought to bear. Certainly a couple of the sequels have proved a little average and hence I was very surprised with just how damn good Saw VI really is.

Jigsaw is dead and Detective Hoffman is supposedly continuing his legacy. But Hoffman is arrogant and uses the Jigsaw killings for his own agenda. While we may think Hoffman is Jigsaw's only remaining apprentice, the truth is that Jigsaw's estranged wife has slowly come to appreciate the power of his methods.

When Jigsaw's Will is read, as part of his estate







his wife receives a box containing a special device and six envelopes. On demand she hands over five of the envelopes to Hoffman who immediately puts into play five new Saw events. She keeps one envelope for herself and this will prove key to the final scenes of the film.

The traps in Saw VI are inventive and impressive, the devices are marvellous and the sheer sadism of the scenes shocking. At the same time what is most impressive is the way in which so many questions from earlier films are answered and so many ends tied together. This is a very impressive sequel which is high on plot, creativity and sheer horror.

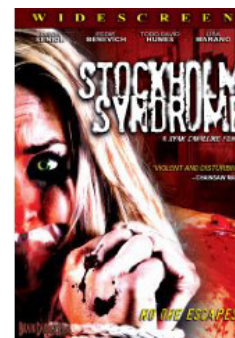
It is fascinating that even though Jigsaw, played so well by Tobin Bell, is dead, the story keeps him alive and his presence controls every scene. Since the Eighties horror fans have been warning a new anti-hero in the vein of Freddy or Jason and Jigsaw has certainly come to play this role. In many ways his is a character with a "philosophy" and this makes him very different from such horror characters as Freddy or Jason and perhaps more like Pinhead of the Hellraiser films. He works by very strict rules and anyone who crosses them, victim or collaborator, will have to pay.

The shock value of the "torture" scenes cannot be underplayed and it is nicely uncomfortable when you find that you are hoping for the insurance adjuster to get slaughtered. The moral quandaries of the film are always interesting and while we may not agree with Jigsaw, his sense of justice as opposed to soft options which leave the innocent out to dry is enticing.

The contents of the sixth envelope are a nice surprise and the climactic scene certainly has a great punch and leaves open room for another sequel.

## Stockholm Syndrome Brain Damage Films R1 DVD

The Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological condition where kidnap victims develop sympathy to their captors. It was named after a bank robbery in Stockholm where victims, after six days in captivity, refused to testify against their captors.



Stockholm Syndrome is a low budget film exploring issues relating to slavery and extreme violence. It is certainly going to confront most people who watch it and the scenes of cruelty are graphic. While the budget of the film certainly limits the effectiveness of some of the scenes, that could be perhaps a blessing in disguise considering what is shown. Scenes range from a pregnant woman being kicked in the stomach for five minutes to induce an abortion, a baby being cut up and slaughtered, a priest torturing and killing a young girl and lots more.

The plot takes place in an isolated and sleepy rural region where an underground organization is in operation. People are being kidnapped, beaten and tortured beyond comprehension. But that is just the beginning, they are "conditioned" (hence the title of the film) to follow the instructions of their leaders and then sold to the highest bidder. The story follows a young man and his very pregnant wife who check in to a run-down motel, at the same time one of the members of the organisation is questioning his allegiance; soon all three will have to face the truly brutal nature of the enemy they are up against.

Director Ryan Cavalline is an indie filmmaker who works hard to hone his craft on a very limited budget. His films are a matter of taste and certainly have strong violence and gore. Stockholm Syndrome has moved strongly into the "torture porn" genre and achieves what it sets out to do. The acting, special effects and cinematography are on par with what one expects from an indie film, though the plot does challenge in its sheer ferocity. While some of Cavalline's earlier films were marked by a dark humour, this is an "in your face" exploration of the darkest side of the human animal and will be of interest to those willing to be confronted and challenged.

**The Texas Chain Saw Massacre**  
**Seriously Ultimate Edition Blu-ray**  
**Blu Ray Region B**  
**Second Sight**

*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* changed the face of horror. Released in 1974 it shocked and horrified audiences and caused outrage wherever it was shown. It was cut, edited and censored and banned in many countries.

For years its importance was underplayed, however in 2009 we can look back and realize it's great significance. It broke new ground in its depiction of horror and violence, in the creation of suspense and it created a new genre where the ultimate enemy was not the supernatural but man himself.

The story was simple enough; a group of young friends (including Franklin, a disabled man) are travelling to an isolated country location for a holiday. They pick up a strange hitchhiker who seems rather disturbed, when they eject him from the van after he self harms and sets fire to a photography, he slashes Franklin's arm and smears a symbol on the side of the van in blood.

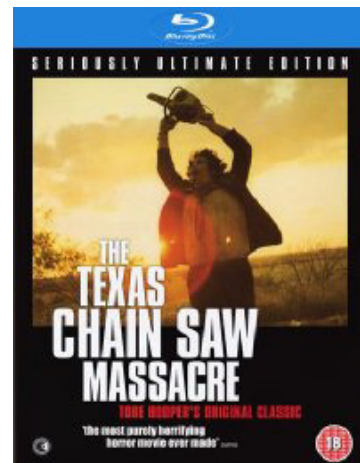
As they turn off to visit a ramshackle old home, they pass a meatworks. When they arrive at the house they find they are low on fuel and seeing another house in the distance go and try to borrow or buy some petrol to get them back to the

station. Little do they know the house is the property of a family of cannibals led by the chainsaw wielding "Leatherface".

The significance of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* can be overplayed, though released in 1974 it is still a powerful work of horror cinema with many sequels and copies. It influenced horror filmmaking in ways that cannot easily be estimated.

There are so many innovative and creative aspects to the film which range from an impressive use of sound and colour to the unusual plot. From the very beginning the film is marked by an unusual approach to cinematography, the opening scenes where a blank screen cuts to images of decayed body parts accompanied by discordant electronic music is incredibly atmospheric and this creativity continues throughout the film.

The use of colour is moody and suspenseful from the bright red of the hot and dry sky to the dark of the night as Leatherface chases his







prey. The acting is superb with each of the characters well fleshed out, Franklin as disabled man brings an unusual edge to the group, the one man out with two couples his loneliness and frustration is palpable.

One of the most unique aspects to the tale is the creation of a truly compelling adversary. Rather than using any supernatural elements, Hooper has given terror a very human form. While the Texas cannibal family look somewhat like us, their values and way of life is so different they seem barely human.

At the same time Hooper plays with our own perception of how we live. He focuses our gaze on the killing of animals for food; Franklin discusses in gruesome details the way animals are killed and relates how his family worked in the local abattoir.

Hooper then juxtaposes this with the Cannibal clan who kill humans for food; they are doing exactly the same as us, using the same tools, keeping the food in freezers and indeed even using the bones for furniture and decoration. Hooper is not making a "vegetarian" statement but simply creating two different sets of "social values" and then bringing them into conflict in a very innovative and confronting way.

This strange comparison creates a very unusual plot which confronts, horrifies and shocks. The climatic hunt where Sally escapes, is betrayed and escapes again, finally making it out alive keeps you on the edge of your seat for the whole period.

One of the problems I have always experienced with this work is its reproduction on video and DVD. It is a film which offers a very unique form of cinematography with great depths of colour, superior use of shadow and an amazing score. So often video and later DVD releases did not do justice to the film so it could not be experienced in its full confronting glory.



Having seen it in a cinema the different always stood out, until now.

The Blu-ray edition from Second Sight is nothing short of amazing and really does justice to this unique film. It has been remastered in high definition from the 16mm ECO camera originals offers the original mono, 2.0 PCM and a superb DTS 5.1 audio track. The DTS 5.1 is just astounding; creating a superbly atmospheric mood throughout, the surround sound of the chainsaw is not easily forgotten. The colour depth, texture and look of the film is fantastic and you see so much more than in any other edition.

The extras are comprehensive including commentaries, documentaries "The Shocking Truth" and "Flesh Wounds", Interviews, A tour of the TCSM house with Gunnar Hansen, outtakes and deleted scenes.

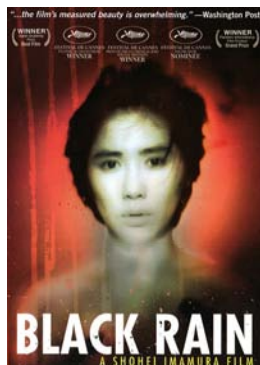
This is truly the ultimate Texas Chain Saw package.



**Black Rain (1989)**  
**AnimEigo**  
**R1 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
 Bob Estreich

Black and White,  
 Japanese with clear  
 English subtitles



Black Rain is a disturbing film about the aftermath of the Hiroshima atomic bomb. It looks at the clash of an old culture trying to face a new menace and the different effects of the bomb.

Just after the bomb was dropped Mr and Mrs Shizuma and their niece Yasuko evacuated to their house in a village up in the hills. Unsuccessful in their search for her parents they raised Yasuko. Their memories of the bomb occur in flashbacks throughout the film. The scenes of the devastation of Hiroshima are thankfully brief but they live in the memories of the survivors.

Five years later Yasuko is of marriageable age but is having difficulty finding a prospective husband. There are many survivors of the bomb blast in the village and the villagers are well aware with the problems of radiation sickness. The worst cases, those caught in the flash, have mostly died. It is those who have secondary radiation poisoning – the ones who drank contaminated water or were caught in the black rain of radioactive particles as the mushroom cloud spread – who are now becoming ill. There are rumours in the village that Yasuko was caught in the black rain and is contaminated. If so, she will have a short life, a painful death, and will never bear children. The village doctor believes she is not at risk but the people of the village think otherwise.

Yasuko's only real friend is Yuichi, survivor of a

suicide squad in the Japanese Army whose job was to throw bombs under tanks. After making a number of such attacks Yuichi, who is now a capable sculptor, is now set off into bouts of madness by the sound of an engine. He will throw himself on the road in front of a moving vehicle and try to stuff an imaginary explosive charge under the wheels. He is in love with Yasuko but because of his madness he is not taken seriously.

Life goes on but always there is the underlying tension in the village of the risk of radiation sickness. Who will be next? It can show up years later in the survivors, and finally does so. Yasuko's Uncle Shigematsu loses two of his friends in one month to the sickness. He himself is now showing the first signs. Auntie Shigeko is a tough woman and feels she is strong enough to avoid the sickness, but feels shamed that she is unable to find a suitable husband for Yasuko.

Then Auntie Shigeko starts showing signs of the sickness and Yasuko herself finds a tumour on her body that means she also has the disease.

Director Shohei Imamura has produced a dreadfully sad film, showing how hard it is for a rural culture to handle the aftermath of such a war. In the face of a modern disaster they only have limited medical support, useless religious practices, faith healers, ineffective folk remedies and themselves. The sickness lives behind them like a shadow right through their lives and if they succumb they know what the consequences will be – a slow, painful death.

We recently reviewed *The Ballad of Narayama*, another film by Shohei Imamura. In that film he looked at the problem of a village supporting its elderly through a harsh winter and the tradition that the elderly would be left to die of exposure on a holy mountain.







At least that film offered the hope of a painless death and a good afterlife for those who had reached the end of their time. There is none of that in *Black Rain*.

They are dying are comparatively young and their deaths are unnecessary and pointless. There is no cultural support for what is happening to them since their culture has never experienced this before.

The film doesn't preach about nuclear war, but with the Korean war going on at the time of the film and the U.S. again threatening to use atomic bombs, sometimes the characters must ask if they have learned anything from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Otherwise they are resigned to it and just do their best to get on with their lives.

The extras are interesting. There is a 19-minute alternative ending in colour which is quite a contrast to the rest of the film. An interview with assistant director Takashi Miike reveals some of the difference in interpretation between the director and the writer of the book.

These issues were resolved but the two were approaching the film from different directions. The colour ending was not part of the book, but the director was keen to include it. In the end it was left out despite being one of the more expensive scenes in the film.

Yoshio Tanako (Yasuko) describes how the director would not let the actors and actresses go back to Tokyo, even for a day. In the mountain village where the bulk of the film was shot there was no convenience store – every little luxury was brought in. The director wanted them to keep the slightly haggard look they developed on their basic diet.

The Multimedia Vault contains a wealth of photos, radio broadcasts and propaganda material before and after the bomb.

**Children of Glory  
(2009)  
Reel DVD  
R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

Hungarian language  
with English subtitles

Hungary, 1956. The country is firmly under the control of Russia who is using countries like Poland, Hungary and East Germany as a buffer zone against NATO. They have no intention of giving up control of these countries. Hungary is run by a puppet government and the secret police, the hated AVO. There is a lot of civil unrest and the country is just waiting for a spark to ignite a revolt.

In Russia the Hungarian water polo team is having a "friendly" game against the Russians. In the pool it is mayhem. The Russian umpire has been told to make sure the Russians win and the Hungarians have no chance of winning the game. The game gets nasty and is called off when Karcsi, one of the team's best players, throws the ball at the crooked umpire. Their only hope of a win is later in the year at the Melbourne Olympics. With an impartial umpire and the whole world watching they can prove they are the better team. This is far from their minds at the moment. They live a rather privileged life and would rather spend their time off chasing women.

On their return to Budapest Karcsi is pulled in by the Minister who controls the AVO. He is threatened that he will lose privileges if he offends the Russians again.

Through a friend at University Karcsi meets Viki, a politically inclined student who at first finds him a bit of a show-off and derides him for lack of political commitment.





She is herself naive about politics, believing the way to get the Russians to leave Hungary is to issue manifestos, form committees, and rally students to the cause. To this end she has helped organise a huge demonstration in the main public square in Budapest. At first the demonstration seems to be successful but then the AVO start indiscriminately shooting the protesters. Karcsi and Viki are caught up in the terror and barely escape. Karcsi's and Viki's University friend is killed. The Russians send tanks into the streets to "restore order". Karcsi and Viki go to Viki's room for the night and begin to fall in love. After another unsuccessful demonstration at the radio station, put down by the AVO, they take refuge in Karcsi's mother's house. Here we also see the dilemma posed for the Hungarian people. Karcsi's grandfather is all for evicting the Russians by force of revolution but at his age he won't be able to help. Karcsi's mother relies on him to feed the family and cannot see any good coming out of a revolt. His younger teenage brother Joszi can see only glory and excitement fighting the Russians.

Karcsi drops out of the team, fully committed now to the revolution. He is aware that the AVO know everything about him, what he says and does in the team, who he associates with. There is obviously an AVO informer in the team and it turns out to be his best friend.

The revolution is too easily won. Some of the Russian troops have been stationed in Hungary for so long they have come to like the locals. The government announces that the Russians have agreed to leave Hungary, that the AVO will be disbanded and a new government will be elected. The students are jubilant – they think they have won. Karcsi rejoins the team to go to the Olympics. On their way to the airport that night they see fresh tanks and troops rolling back into Budapest. The Russian have gone back on their word. Karcsi can do nothing except fight for his country in the pool at the Olympics.



The Russians take their revenge on Budapest with a brutality not seen since World War 2. The students still naively believe the Americans will come to their rescue but the Americans are more concerned about the sudden breakout of war over the Suez Canal between Israel and Egypt. Disillusioned, many students leave the movement. The others, including Viki, are being hunted down by the AVO.

The team itself is disintegrating. Some members have been offered asylum and jobs in the United States. First, though, there is the Olympics. Both Hungary and Russia make it to the semi-final. With an independent umpire the Hungarians' skill soon has them leading the Russians and the game again gets bloody and savage. The team wins, but meanwhile Hungary is lost.

There is really no happy ending. Hungary's fight for its freedom was ruthlessly squashed and it wasn't until many years later with the weakening of the Warsaw Pact and revolution in Poland that Hungary had a chance of regaining its independence.

The 1956 revolution is shown for what it was – an ill prepared attempt at revolution by naive people who had no idea what they were doing and believed everything they were told. The story as told here, though, is no less powerful for that. The human touch given to the film by Karcsi and Viki only makes the failure of the revolution more poignant.





**The Good, The Bad, The Weird**  
**Eastern Eye/Madman**  
**R4 DVD**

Korean with English Subtitles

Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, on which this film is obviously based, was an Italian film made in Spain. This film is therefore a South Korean western made in Manchuria based on an Italian film made in Spain. Well, why not? The Koreans have a thriving film industry and seem to have a pretty good try at any genre so I was interested to see how this turned out.

The lead characters are the bounty hunter, the hired killer and the ....raving idiot? They are all searching for a treasure map showing where Alexander the Great buried his fabulous treasure in the Manchurian desert. He must have been a long way off course, but historical accuracy is not a strong point of the film.

It is set in the 1930s, a time when Korea was still part of the Japanese empire and the independence movement was just getting started. The Japanese Army also occupied Manchuria since it was a valuable source of raw materials. The Japanese and the Korean Independence movement would like to find the treasure as well. So would a number of gangs of criminals and bandits. The map changes hands many times.

The film has the classic Western touches – a train robbery, cavalry charge, gunfights, explosions and a final showdown in the desert. The heroes, of course, are bulletproof and never get hit, even when taking on machineguns or the Japanese Army. Many scenes owe a lot to other westerns – watch the film closely and see how many you can pick up.

All are done with that slightly “wrong” touch that



keeps the film funny and makes up for some of the extended violence. And it is a very violent film. The number of people killed by gunfire is far less than those killed by knives. Director Kim Jee-Woon glories in the blood and gore scenes. Some would simply be too long but he interjects little moments of comedy that take the edge off, and then keeps the fight going.

Song Kang-Ho (*The Weird*) is a good choice for the comedy bits as well as a major protagonist. Although he is a good fighter, his bumbling incompetence leads him into a lot of trouble. Jung Woo-Sung (*The Good*) is the cold, competent bounty hunter. Of all the characters in the film he is possibly the most believable. Lee Byung-Hyun (*The Bad*) is the killer. His youthful good looks and well-dressed style make him seem a bit like a fish out of water in a western but he is the perfect contrast with the other two.

One of the strong points of the spaghetti westerns was the dry, dusty realistic scenery. This has carried into this film. The buildings even have the same dried-out, ramshackle, paint-challenged look. Nit-pickers will love the film, too. Kim Jee-Woon has happily trampled all over historical accuracy so we have trail bikes, Lee-Enfield rifles, jeeps and so much more. There are many Sergio Leone touches, like the up-the-nostril close-ups. Many other cliché shots are thrown in, like the lone rider silhouetted against the sky.

I loved the film. It's not intended to be a spoof, just a rollicking good Western in the spaghetti western style. It works well and it's heaps of fun.

Extras on the R4 version include Behind the Scenes, Cast and Crew interviews, deleted scenes and alternative endings.



**Jade Warrior**  
**Bonzai Media**  
**All Region NTSC**

Jade Warrior is a very unusual film. It hit the film festivals in 2007 and was marketed as Finland's first martial arts film; in my mind this did it a grave disservice.



Don't get me wrong I like martial arts film and there is some excellent "Hong Kong Cinema" like martial arts and action sequences in this film, but Jade Warrior is more than that, far more.

The way in which the film links the Chinese and Finnish elements is by playing with myth and legend. The focus of the film is on the Kalevala, a highly significant European saga cycle which is Finland's national epic. In this text there is a powerful object which can offer all happiness known as the Sampo, this object is also found in Chinese legends. There are various battles between men and gods for this object but in this tale the focus is on love and loss and is presented across both Chinese and Finnish cultures.

The film alternates between the present and an unspecified period in Ancient China. In present day Finland Berg (Markku Peltola) and Weckstrom (Elle Kull) are investigating an unusual discovery, an ornate octagonal metal box. Berg has no success opening it until Ronja (Krista Kosonen) arrives.

She has just ended a difficult relationship and is getting rid of her ex-boyfriends goods. Since Kai (Tommi Eronen) is a blacksmith, some of his powdered hair and nails are in one of the tins and when it touches the box, it begins to open.

Berg soon realizes that Kai has some strange affinity for the box and moreover may be the key



to their greater aim of recovering the Sampo.

As he encourages Kai to realize who he is and forge the key to the Sampo, Kai re-experiences his past in Ancient China and a long and fascinating tale unfolds involving reincarnation, demons and swords and love and loss.

We learn of a battle between a great demon and the "Son of the Smith" and how thwarted love leads to a wrong decision which not only echoes through time but threatens the very fabric of the modern world. The climax of the film is unexpected with the mixture of the past and present, supernatural and mythic themes all rolled into one.

This is a beautiful film, filled with demons, martial arts, thwarted love and mythology. It has a truly remarkable soundtrack (though the music clip in the extras goes a little too far into new age folk for my liking) and some amazing cinematography. It is a film which seems to exist between two great cultures and the way it amalgamates both the Kalevala and Chinese myths is impressive.

The martial arts scenes are creatively done with some amazing sledgehammer fighting and a blade/love match which is erotic and beautifully stylized. The characters are all extremely believable and you find yourself totally absorbed into this highly creative fantasy. The time flew as I watched this film and I wasn't bored for even one second, each scene seemed to move in new and interesting directions and until the very end I was challenged and stimulated.

Jade Warrior is an innovative, creative and adventurous film which combines folklore with fantasy in quite a unique manner. It can be a bit difficult to find a copy; we found ours at Asian Cult Cinema (<http://www.asiancult.com>)



**Luxury Car**  
Global Film  
Initiative  
First Run Features  
R1 DVD

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich



Li Qiming is an elderly schoolteacher from a small country town. His wife is dying of cancer and wants to see their estranged son before she dies, so he travels to the city of Wuhan to try to find him. His daughter YanHong is already living there.

Unknown to her father she is working as a prostitute at an escort bar. Her main customer is the gangster Ge He who has kindly feelings towards her and to whom she is pregnant. Ge He drives the luxury car of the title as a symbol of his worldly success.

Li enlists the help of a near-retirement police officer who handled the case of his missing son. The officer himself has a son missing in Tibet so the two hit it off. By following what clues there are they track the son to the city of Shenzhen.

The trail has gone cold there but Li decides he will return during the winter holidays and try to find his son one more time. Meanwhile his holidays are almost over and he yearns to get back to his quiet little country school.

Ge He reveals to YanHong that he knows more about her brother. When her brother first came to Wuhan he joined Ge He's gang and was accidentally killed in a gangland ambush. Out of respect for the aging Li he doesn't want YanHong to tell her father this as it will crush Li's hopes of finding his son alive. At a farewell dinner before Li returns to the country it all starts to fall apart. The policeman recognises Ge He as a gangster. Li, not as naive as he seems, has already



realised that his daughter is working as a prostitute and suspects she is pregnant. A rival gang targets Ge He and the killing starts.

The story is about changing cultures as much as anything. Li was a radical young student who made anti-revolutionary comments forty years ago and was banished to the country. There he met his future wife and became content with the quiet rural lifestyle. As a schoolteacher he has respect and the satisfaction of watching "his" schoolchildren grow up in modern China. His own children have come to Wuhan in search of the newer materialistic culture of modern China. They have found it, but YanHong has also found that it was not what she expected when you are on the bottom of the social heap. It has cost her self respect and her brother his life. Even Ge He, further up in the materialistic culture, has done time in prison already and may not be strong enough to fight off his enemies.

The performances are wonderful. Rock singer Tian Yuan, who plays YanHong, appears a little lost and vulnerable in the lifestyle she is trapped in. Wu Youcai as Li is perfect – quiet, a little world-wise even though he appears to the others as a country hick, but willing to do anything to make his wife happy one last time.

Li Yiqing as the policeman is a solid, sympathetic character carrying his own loss, but he is well aware of the seedy background of life in the city. Huang He as the gangster suggests there may be some real affection between his character and YanHong, but he still has a necessarily ruthless side when his world is threatened.

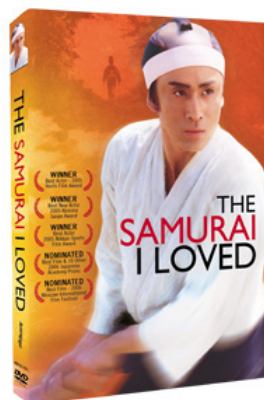
Director Wang Chao has played the film as a straight narrative with no fancy flourishes or political statements. If there is a message behind the film he seems to have left it to the viewer to work it out in their own way.

Luxury Car is in Mandarin with English subtitles.



**The Samurai I Loved**  
Toho Film Company  
AnimEigo 2009  
R1 DVD

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich



The story takes place in Japan during its feudal era. Bunshiro is a young student. His father has become involved in a struggle over who will succeed their feudal lord. His side has lost and he is forced to commit seppuku (ritual disembowelling). Since his father is regarded as a traitor in the village most of the people now avoid Bunshiro, except for Fuku, the young girl next door. He is falling in love with her.

Bunshiro's mother is forced from the family home to live in poverty in a ramshackle house at the edge of the village. He continues his studies at the local martial arts dojo as best he can but his future looks grim.

He is called to attend the local administrator, who tried to help Bunshiro's father before his death. He has arranged a job for Bunshiro as a local Crop Inspector. The family name is rehabilitated and his mother moves back into the old family home. Fuku has moved to the city of Edo as a maid in the local warlord's castle. She has come to the lord's notice and is now a concubine. The power struggle for a successor continues.

One of the lord's senior wives is out to make sure her son is chosen as the successor and has had Fuku's baby son killed. Fuku has had another baby boy and has now fled the capital to her old home town

The administrator's duplicity now shows out. He orders Bunshiro to take the baby from Fuku and bring it to him. With the baby in his power he will



be able to win a concurrent power struggle with his superior in the capital. If the kidnap doesn't work out Bunshiro will be blamed and executed. Bunshiro must now decide between loyalty to his master or his love for Fuku. Either way there will be bloodshed. He finds unexpected help from the local villagers and from his old friends at the dojo, but the looming showdown will still happen.

Producer Mitsuo Kurotsuchi has given us a lovely film. The acting is good, the story is intelligible and the cinematography is superb. The forbidden love between Fuku and Bunshiro is underplayed but is more powerful for that.

One feature of the film is the use of extra subtitles at the top of the picture to explain references in the film that haven't translated very well. These are only occasionally used and do not interfere with the flow of the film in any way, but help us better understand the culture in which the film is set.

The DVD includes a wide range of extras – an image gallery, cast and crew biographies, notes and an interview with the director.

The film is in Japanese with clear subtitles.





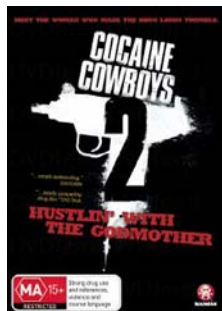
**Cocaine Cowboys II –  
Hustlin' with the  
Godmother  
Madman  
R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

This film is the story of two people – Charles Cosby, a young Negro drug dealer, and Griselda Blanco, a Colombian drug importer and at one time probably the biggest drug distributor in the United States. We start with Cosby, who narrates most of the story. He is quite unashamed about his drug dealing. He wanted money, lots of it, and drug dealing was the quickest way to get it. He doesn't try to blame it on the users, he seems completely amoral about the effect his drugs have on the buyers – he's only in it for the money. He may be a shallow, selfish person but he knew what he wanted. The big gangs moved into Oakland and he was being squeezed out. He had supply problems.

Now we look at the history of Griselda Blanco, a hard-as-nails woman who was determined to become the biggest dealer in the U.S. She was succeeding through a combination of good supply (this was before the Medellin Cartel really got their act together) and ruthless management of her dealers and distributors. As Cosby put it, if you were late paying money you owed her she would kill you. If she owed you money and didn't feel like paying, she would kill you. She was currently serving twenty years in prison and Cosby saw an item on TV about her.

For some reason he felt compelled to write to her in 1991. Letters led to phone calls and then to visits to her in prison. She helped out his struggling drug dealership and the two became closer. Gradually he rose in the ranks of her organisation, not without resistance from other members of the gang. George Rivi Ayala, a high ranking member of the gang, says Cosby was



regarded as an upstart and only had his position because he was Blanco's kept man. Personally he didn't like negroes and more importantly neither did the Colombian suppliers.

Blanco ran her empire from prison as if nothing had happened. She and Cosby were able to have sex on visiting days (it cost \$1500 a time for the guards to look the other way) and she wore exorbitant jewellery and makeup. She continued to order the execution of those who displeased her – Cosby himself was nearly a victim when she found he was having sex with another girl. Blanco was attributed with over 200 murders, including three of her husbands.

By the 1990s cocaine use had reached the status of an epidemic in the U.S. FBI agents interviewed for the film discuss their attempts to build a case against Blanco before she got out of prison. Finally just months before she was due out they charged her with three murders. This would be enough to send her to the electric chair. Their case received a major setback when it was revealed that at least two mobsters were having affairs with secretaries in the Florida Prosecutor's office. This forced the FBI to plea bargain with Blanco's lawyers and she escaped the chair. She did not escape prison, though, and at this point her empire started to collapse. Many of her senior staff abandoned her organisation. The suppliers in Colombia executed some of her people, set up their own cartel and moved in on the U.S. distribution. On her release from prison Blanco was deported back to Colombia the next day.

Many in her organisation seem to have gotten away with their crimes. Cosby seems quite well-off although he now has a bodyguard, and even Rivi who was one of her hitmen seems to have come out of it well-to-do. The whole story has an authentic feel to it from the extensive use of newspaper clippings and photos from the time. Having the gangsters tell their own story gives a far more personal feel to the whole sordid business.

There are two annoying notes. The rap tracks seem to feature "mothafucka" rather a lot – this just cheapens the effect. The second is that Cosby's bodyguard / friend / son-in-law is verbally illiterate. Every, like, third sentence is, like, you know, like "you hear what I'm sayin?" EVERY third sentence. A bit of speech coaching could have made this less irritating. By the end of the film I was ready to shoot him myself. Otherwise, though, it's a great if worrying film about a major social problem.



**The Mapmakers**  
(2004)  
SBS Australia  
Roadshow  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

This brilliant three-part series deals with the development of knowledge of the geography of the world and the importance of maps throughout history. It starts in the early days when maps were based on the Bible and purported to show Biblical places rather than seriously attempt to depict the world. It carries through to the specific use and importance of maps in the D-Day invasion of World War II. Cartography is a science that is largely ignored but this series shows in stunning detail just how important it is.

Early maps were glorious pictures supporting the Bible by showing the supposed locations of places named in the holy book. The so-called Mappa Mundi was not intended for navigation at all.

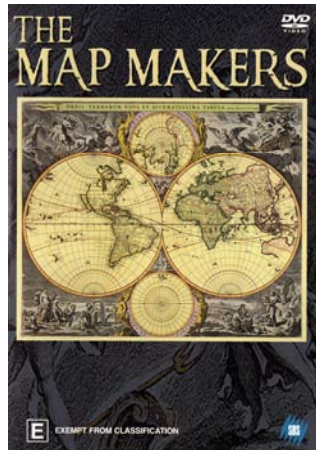
An example kept at Hereford Cathedral in Britain shows Jerusalem at the center of the world. As Europe came out of the Dark Ages early books like Ptolemy's *Geographia* were being rediscovered, translated, and run off by the thousands on the new printing presses.

Ptolemy's *Geographia* was nothing less than a textbook on how to construct a map and it included geographical references for many important cities and sites. By the early 1500s most mapmakers realised there were errors in even in Ptolemy. The major problem was that Ptolemy thought the world was smaller than it was, and this for instance led Columbus to believe that the Spice Islands of the Indies would only be a short voyage to the west.

### Part 1: The Waldseemuller Map

Waldseemuller and Ringman were cartographers at the Gymnasium (University) at Saint-Die. The late 1400s was an exciting time to be working on maps.

A sea route was necessary as the land route to the riches of Cathay described by Marco Polo was now blocked by the growth of the Islamic Empire. The Portuguese travelled south to work

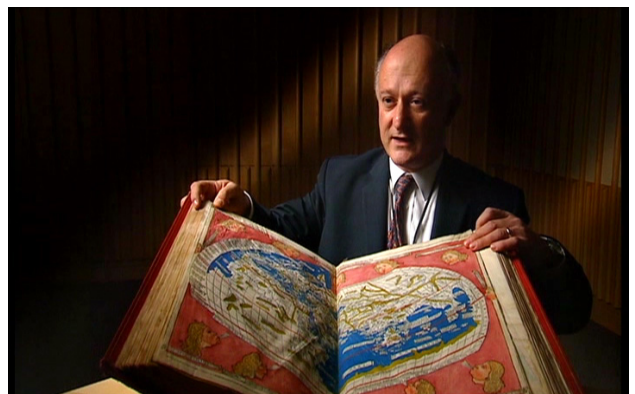


around South Africa and made maps of their voyages. Spain looked to the west. In 1492 Columbus discovered the islands of what we now call the West Indies. All this new information got to Waldseemuller and Ringman for incorporation in their maps. As new information kept coming in their map was changed regularly.

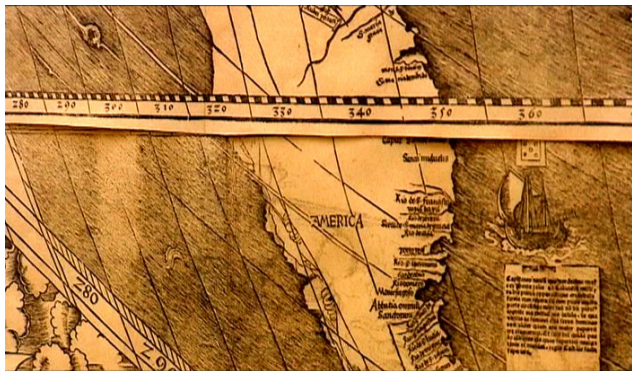
One of Columbus's captains, Juan de la Cosa, was the first to map part of the coast of the American mainland in the Central Americas in 1500 but he didn't name it. He didn't seem to know if it was part of Asia as Columbus insisted or something else. De la Cosa's map included the Portuguese discoveries along the African coast, the islands and coastline of Central America, and even the areas mentioned by Marco Polo. It was the most important map of its time and Waldseemuller and Ringman would have known about it and incorporated it in their new map. Although much of this information was supposedly secret it was passed to their patron by other aristocrats seeking influence with him.

In 1507 Waldseemuller and Ringman published their new map showing all the discoveries to date. Importantly they gave the new land a name – they recognised it as a continent, not just a group of islands or part of the Asian coast. They called it America after Amerigo Vespucci, the navigator who mapped so much of its coastline and proved its size. They also prophetically included a sea to the west of America between America and China.

Although Columbus is widely known as the discoverer of America, he did not actually find the continent – he found the islands of the West Indies. Until his death he still believed that he had found the East Indies. Waldseemuller and Ringman recognised this distinction and gave credit for the discovery of America itself to Vespucci. Critically Columbus never accepted that there was a fourth continent.







This has been controversial. Vespucci was believed to have embellished his accounts and the relatives of Columbus used this to do a character assassination on him in an attempt to restore Columbus as the discoverer of America. This was partly successful.

Although over a thousand copies of the map were printed the Waldseemüller map was long thought to be lost. Maps were usually glued to walls and as buildings were destroyed they were lost. The map was only known now from a small book produced by Ringman to accompany the map. Then a copy of the map was found, bound into a book, in Wolfegg Castle in southern Germany in 1901. For hundreds of years the Princes of the castle had been collecting maps and documents.

To Europeans it was a valuable piece of their mercantile history. To Americans it was the first mention of their continent and the map's accompanying booklet *Cosmographiae* and the Waldseemüller map have been called "the Birth Certificate of America". For the first time America is shown as a fourth continent.

The booklet explains why Waldseemüller and Ringman chose to honour Vespucci rather than Columbus. The Americans had to have it. Negotiations took more than eighty years as the German government refused to allow the export of the map. Finally in 2003 the Library of Congress was able to announce that it had bought the map for ten million dollars and would be allowed to take it to the United States.

### Part 2: The Mercator Atlas

In this episode we move forward to Britain in the time of Henry VIII. Henry had split with the Catholic Church and set up the Church of England. He had trouble brewing over the border in Catholic Scotland and the French and Spanish were being urged to take military control of England and return it to Catholicism. Henry needed de-

tailed maps to show the best way to move his troops in case of invasion, where the ports were, and particularly where the Scottish nobles lived in case he had to take Scotland in case of an invasion there. He needed good mapmakers and in the case of Scotland, someone who knew the country.

Although he knew the risk of betrayal, he hired a Scottish mapmaker, John Elder, and two French mapmakers, Jean Rotz and Nicolas de Nicolay. Elder may have been just a mercenary but the two Frenchmen were almost certainly spies. All betrayed Henry or at best sold their services and their maps to others for higher pay. Elder mapped England and Scotland. He departed from the old pictorial style of map – Henry needed maps that could be used by his military, not pretty pictures.

Henry needed accurate scales so he could judge marching times between towns, gunnery ranges, and how far inland the guns of a foreign warship could reach. He needed to know where the local nobles lived and what sort of roads and bridges existed between the towns. He settled on a standard scale of one inch to 500 feet. Such information was incredibly valuable for military use both to Henry and to an invader. Elder sold copies of his maps overseas but at least he completed the map of Scotland. He was thus a traitor to his own people when Henry invaded and took Scotland. Henry's invasion was only forced back with the help of the French.

The French mapmakers sent copies of their maps back to Henry's enemies in France. These are possibly some of the first recorded examples of military espionage. When Henry died his map library was looted and many of the secret maps found their way to Europe. When Henry's daughter Mary, a devout Catholic, took the throne and married Phillip of Spain. Elder changed sides again and promised his loyalty to Spain.

Gerard Mercator was a mapmaker who had invented a new way of displaying or "projecting" map information onto a flat surface with minimum distortion. This was exactly what was needed for a military map. He had aroused the anger of the Catholic Church for his Protestant leanings. He had narrowly escaped being put to death.

When the powerful French Cardinal Lorraine sent him Elder's maps and 'requested' him to make copies he had no choice.

His Atlas of 1572 shows England and Scotland in detail, but curiously Scotland is shown out of scale with England – the way the maps are presented it looks like a country as large as England and the map therefore gives a false idea of its size and influence. If Protestant England was to be invaded his maps would mislead the invaders. This could not have been an error as Mercator was well aware of the need for accuracy of scale in a map.

When copying Elder's information into his own maps there were translation errors that a trained eye could use to pick Elder as the source of the stolen maps. Mercator's maps included both sides of the Channel and they would have been just as useful to the English. Because of the highly secret nature of the information contained in the maps the Atlas was then hidden away for two hundred years and never used for its intended purpose of war.

A copy of Mercator's atlas was discovered in Brussels in 1967 and the strategic importance of the maps was rediscovered. Mercator's projection is still used on maps today.

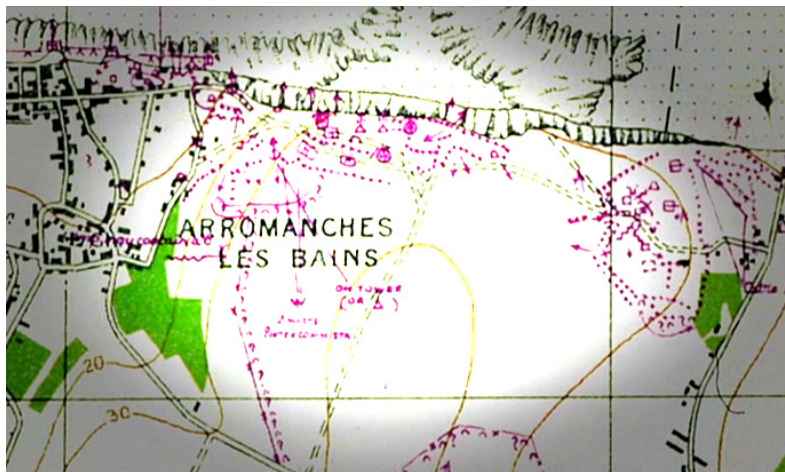
### Part 3: The D-Day Invasion Maps

Accurate detailed maps have never been quite as important as those issued to the invading Allied troops for the D-Day invasion of France. The existing French maps were from the 1890s and were to a 1:80,000 scale. They were mostly useless for military purposes. The Allies had to map the critical areas of the French coast from scratch. They needed detailed information especially on the construction details of Hitler's "Atlantic Wall".

It wasn't just a matter of mapping roads and railways and towns. The captains of the landing ships needed to know what depth of water there would be at different stages of the tide. Tank commanders needed to know what areas would take the weight of their vehicles – many of the areas just behind the beaches had been flooded to make them impassable to vehicles.

The naval gunners needed to know the location of every pillbox and bunker and the nature of its construction so they could use the right shells to penetrate the concrete. Even the calibre of the guns was necessary information.

Information was compiled from the local Re-



sistance at great risk, from maps stolen from the Germans, even from tourist photos from peacetime. Fast planes constantly overflew the coast updating the maps. Flying an unarmed photo reconnaissance plane in a straight line at low altitude was an easy way to be shot down. Many pilots did not return from these missions. It was perhaps not as suicidal as the naval divers who carefully landed on dark nights and tested the quality of the sand on the landing beaches and checked for hidden reefs. Such information was needed to plot the exact landing point for the landing ships carrying heavy equipment. A landing ship stuck in mud would simply become a sitting duck.

Even the old-style pictorial mapping had its place. A strip of photos showed landing craft captains what the coastline looked like from the sea so they could land their troops in the correct place.

The story of how a Resistance fighter named Rene Duchet smuggled a map of the defences and their construction from the German construction headquarters is heroism at its best.

The result was the most comprehensive set of military maps ever compiled for one area. Much of this information was compiled without any special surveying gear at all. Distances could be measured by the number of turns of the pedals of a bike that it took to get from one point to another. Directions could be worked out with only a compass.

The series is a fascinating look at a little-appreciated part of history. If I have a criticism it's that I would like to have seen more.



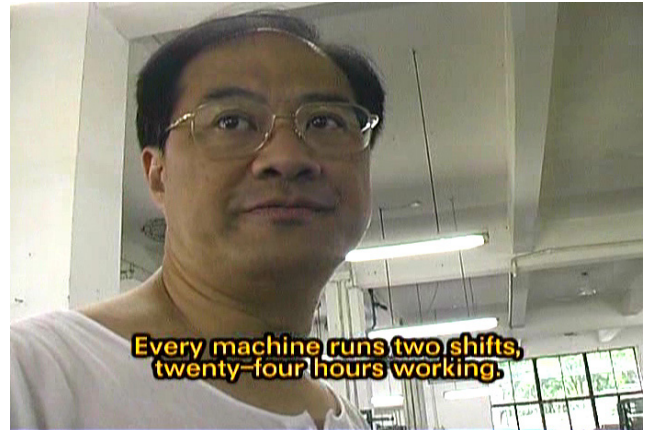
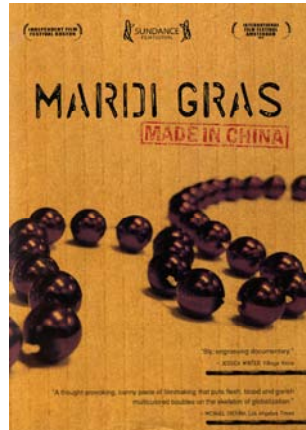
**Mardi Gras –  
Made in Cinema  
2005  
Carnavalesque  
Films  
R1 DVD**

There is a “tradition” in Bourbon Street in New Orleans of throwing strings of beads to young women who flash their breasts at the drunken crowd of revellers. This “tradition” only started in 1978 and seems to have little to do with Mardi Gras itself – it’s just another excuse for holidaymakers to get drunk and behave in ways they wouldn’t do at home. “It makes me horny” explains one vacuous girl.

The “tradition” is being spread to other venues and carnivals as well. Producer David Redmon asks some of the revellers if they know where the beads come from. “Don’t know, don’t care” is one drunk’s summing up. “Hey, it’s boobs for beads, man” is another.

The film then crosses to a factory in Fuzhou in the Peoples Republic of China where the beads are made. They are cheap, tawdry polystyrene or polyethylene products but there is a high labour content in each string of beads.

There are also health risks. The factory is hot and dusty (up to 37 degrees Celsius), it’s not airconditioned, and the fumes from the heated styrene are carcinogenic. The factory’s owner, Roger Wong, makes about one and a half million U.S. dollars a year from his beads and other cheap rubbish. He sells the beads and trinkets to U.S. stores like WalMart who on sell them for about a dollar a string.



Roger is either the world’s greatest expert at self-deception or its most brazen liar. He claims to treat his workers like friends and family but the conditions his “friends” live under are horrendous. His factory is held up as a model of modern Chinese industry but it is a sweatshop - literally. Shifts are twelve hours long, day and night, but often extend to sixteen or more hours.

Time off for meals is added to the working hours so a standard day is at least fourteen hours. If the girls fall behind in their quota they must often work longer hours to make up the shortfall and avoid being fined. These hours allow Roger to crowd the dormitories with one bed for two people. As one worker arrives off shift, another is leaving for the next shift. The amenities are basic. Shifts can be extended at Roger’s whim if there is a contract to be filled and unpaid overtime is common. Even the Sunday off can be cancelled if necessary to meet a contract.

The workers can’t leave the factory grounds without permission so they must pay for their food at the company cafeteria. Ninety percent





Mardi Gras (Thanks to Chinese Baubles)

of the workers are girls because, says Roger, “females are easier to control”.

Roger also treats his “family” harshly when it comes to money. He talks of “punishment” as if his workers are little children. With the youngest around fourteen he may be right. Their pay is minimal – around six dollars a week – but will be cut if they fail to meet quota (5% cut), if they are caught talking during a shift or in the cafeteria (a week’s pay) or if they are caught in the boys’ dormitory rooms (a month’s pay cut). No wonder the factory is surrounded by barbed wire (Roger explains that it’s to keep people out, not keep the workers in, but it’s noticeable that the wire is built to slant inwards).

The series of fines seems to be more of a cost-saving measure than through any moral design. Roger claims to be a moral man but some of the factory goods are blatantly sexual. Although he says he pays the basic wage, the fines and unpaid overtime mean the girls wage is much less than that. One girl calculated that she earned about one cent for each twelve strings of beads she produced.

Roger also claims that he has had no problems with his workers but some time ago they went on strike over wages. They simply wanted no more unpaid overtime, no pay punishment, and Sundays off as a right, not at the management’s whim. Some of the leaders were arrested. A new deal was negotiated that promised to redress the workers’ complaints but in the end it meant even more hours for less money.

Why do the girls put up with it? One girl explained the reality. Most country families are desperately poor and can only afford to educate one member of the family. Even to achieve that



Mardi Gras - The Morning After

takes great sacrifice. The other members must support the one receiving the education. Many young girls have no prospects in the rural villages so they seek jobs in factories and tolerate their harsh existence to send money home. The bead factory is at the bottom of the industrial hierarchy but other factories such as the clothing sweatshops are run on similar lines and are only marginally better. The factories are the only practical source of income for a young unmarried girl in rural China. Similarly, without the pool of sweatshop labour the factories could not exist. It is the exploiter class of people in the middle, like Roger Wong, who make and keep the real money.

The film doesn’t draw conclusions about this. It lets the workers and Roger speak for themselves. I have to wonder if conditions in the early U.S. car assembly lines were that much different. I would even bet that the Chinese conditions closely parallel the factory conditions in early industrial Europe.

China still has a long way to go before it can afford the same conditions as U.S. workers receive. The increasingly restive workforce may be able to force changes in the system but it will take time.

The final scenes are the saddest. The street cleaners have moved into Bourbon Street and are cleaning up the rubbish from the night before. As well as the bottles, vomit and beer cans, the sweeper truck has its brushes clogged with strings of discarded beads. The products of so much hard work and sweat are just rubbish in the gutter.



### **Microcosmos: Special Edition Blu Ray Region B**

A beautiful French meadow on a summer's day is the setting for this incredible, award winning film that takes its microscopic cameras into the heart of the kingdom of the insects.

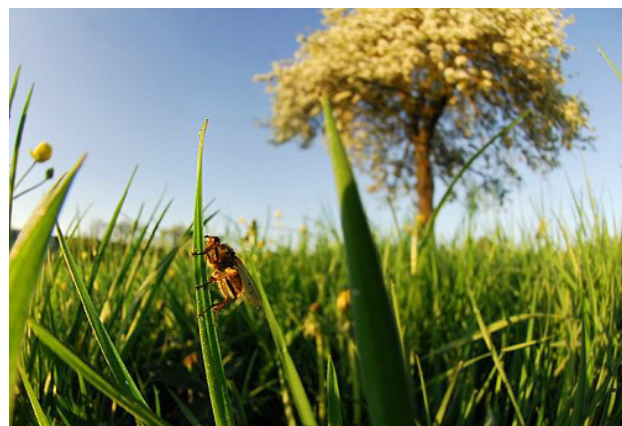


While so many nature documentaries look at what are considered grand animals and focus on the beauty and majesty of dolphins, lions or bears, it is amazing what can be uncovered by getting "down in the dirt" and looking at what is hidden beneath our feet.

There is a microcosmos, a miniature universe where simple things such as a raindrop can cause a flood and a spider can live within an air bubble. We see snails making love, a colony of ants under attack and a beetle pushing a ball of dung up a hill. It is filled with sex, gore and action but it not a Hollywood CGI blockbuster but a reflective French nature doco. It doesn't star big names but stars ants, bees, ladybugs, butterflies, beetles and snails.

To capture such a world is not easy and takes time, special photographix equipment and lots of patience, indeed the film involved fifteen years of research, two years of equipment design and three years of shooting. Microcosmos won five Cesars, the respected French equivalent of an Oscar.

While it may have been made some fifteen years ago, the new Blu Ray edition is nothing short of breathtaking. Presented in 1080/24p it



is visually arresting and offers an excellent range of sound formats including PCM2.0, DD5.1 & DTS 5.1. The DTS 5.1 is so clear it is like being enveloped in nature's sound. This is very significant since the film is not narrative driven but allows the beauty of nature itself to carry the program, which it does admirably !

Features include The World of Microcosmos, The Making of Microcosmos and The Story of 5 Cesars.

### **The Power of Gold (2004) SBS/Roadshow R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:** Bob Estreich

From the earliest days people have been obsessed by gold. It was one of the first metals found in its native form. It was attractive and easy to make into artistic objects although it had no other practical use.



This 3-part documentary looks at the history of gold around the world. The story begins in the kingdoms that occupied what is now Turkey, where gold was plentiful in the rivers and streams. From the Kingdom of Lydia came the first non-decorative use – money. The Lydian stater was a small coin made from naturally occurring electrum, an alloy of gold and silver. The concept of a piece of gold representing value made trading in this part of the world so simple that the idea was adopted in many other countries. In order to maintain the exact ratio of gold to silver in the alloy the Lydians also developed metallurgical techniques for separating the two metals. The first episode shows how important gold was to the early civilisations leading up to the Romans. They had to have



gold to pay their troops so they developed advanced mining techniques that stripped whole mountains in Spain.

In the second episode the story continues. It looks at the gold-driven conquest of South America and the effect of so much gold on European history. One effect was on trade. To avoid the need for merchants to carry bags of gold coin around with them the Promissory Note was introduced. This was literally a note that promised to pay a certain amount in gold coin on demand. Unscrupulous traders could write notes at will without the assets to redeem them so the banks issued their own – the first banknotes.

Still there was a need for coinage for smaller debts but the coinage suffered badly. Coins could be debased by alloying with cheaper metals, “clipped” (small bits clipped off the edge and later sold as bullion) or otherwise converted to less than their face value. Isaac Newton, master of the British Mint, was proud of the integrity of Britain’s coinage. Its coins were of a constant defined weight and purity. He carried out constant war on the clippers and had the edges of new coins “milled”. This was a series of serrations around the edge of a coin that showed clearly if a coin had been clipped. He also set a financial milestone in place – for the first time he set a fixed value on gold and also fixed the ratio of the value between gold and silver. He based all British coinage on this value. This was called the Gold Standard and is still in use today in

Lydian Stater



some countries. By the late 1870s most countries had adopted it.

The third episode details the prosperity that followed. With a fixed amount of gold being worth a fixed amount of money anywhere in the world, trade prospered. One incident detailed in the episode shows how well the French understood the system. In 1797 they landed a small force of a couple of thousand men on the coast of Wales. Some were soldiers but most were prisoners released so they could take part in this adventure. Their object was not to conquer but to destabilize England. Fearing invasion, the public went into panic and there was a run on the Bank Of England to convert the less-trusted banknotes to gold. Its gold reserves fell dangerously low. People didn’t trust the new paper money or even silver coin as much as they trusted gold. That the attempt so nearly succeeded only reinforced in the bankers’ minds the need to acquire even more gold.

The growth in trade continued. Britain as one of the world’s biggest manufacturers took a lot of the world’s gold to pay for their trade goods. New gold discoveries helped – California, Alaska, Siberia, Australia and the biggest of them all, the Rand in South Africa. South Africa was not an alluvial goldfield like California. A large amount of money was needed to dig some of the world’s deepest mines and design new equipment and techniques. Still the demand for gold continued. It was as if every ounce of gold mined created a demand for more.





This prosperity was interrupted by World War I. Britain particularly suffered since it had to import much of its war materiel and this had to be paid for with its gold reserves. The Government, obsessed with returning to the gold standard as soon as possible after the war, tried raising interest rates and lowering wages. This would give it more money with which to buy back gold. The policy caused much hardship among the population and led to general strikes and a change of government.

In the United States, now the richest nation in the world, the situation was much the same. After the War they imposed a system on the rest of the world that saw the U.S. dollar as the main trading currency and it was tied to America's gold reserves. This made the dollar unresponsive to currency movements and the United States, like many other countries, went into Depression rather than lose their gold. Hoover, the President, was accused of valuing "metal over men". Roosevelt's "New Deal" when he became President was to liquidate some of the reserves and use the money on a massive infrastructure building program. With people back in work the Depression petered out. It is this principle that allowed countries like Australia to move quickly out of the most recent Recession. With the advantage of hindsight and no obsession with a gold standard they took fewer years to do it

The U.S. had also passed a law prohibiting the private collecting of gold. This forced trust in the paper dollar and gradually lessened peoples' reliance on gold as a hedge in times of trouble. During Richard Nixon's Presidency the U.S.A. went off the gold standard completely. The world financial system did not collapse as predicted by the bankers. Still the demand for gold continued. Apart from the jewellery industry a new use for gold developed in the thriving electronics industry. It would not tarnish so was ideal for plating onto connectors such as those in computers. Finally the decorative but otherwise useless metal took a place in the world of industry. It is also being tested for possible medicinal use in treating rheumatoid arthritis.

The story finishes in a little South American town called Santa Filomena. There an abandoned gold mine was reopened by the local people and still produces a few ounces of gold a week. The process they use is unmechanised, dreadfully labour-intensive and dangerous, but they persevere because the demand for gold is always there.

### **Second Skin (2009)** **2009** **Roadshow** **R4 DVD**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

This film is about the people who play online role playing games (RPGs) and it follows four players over a couple of years of their life. Computer games are nothing new and have been accused of causing antisocial behaviour for years. Adversaries point out the unreal nature of the games and say players flock to RPGs because they are unwilling to face real life. RPGs are blamed for suicides, breakdown of relationships, economic problems and irresponsible behaviour. How much of this is true? With over 50 million people paying for membership in such games it is a phenomenon that should be looked at carefully.

*MMORPG = massive multiplayer online role playing game*

Games such as World of Warcraft attract huge followings. Surely the players are not all head cases? One thing I noticed immediately in the film is that the online characters (avatars) don't resemble their real world owners. The people we are following are all young men of rather heavy build. In the game they are all slim, muscular and, within the limits of the cartoon style of the game, handsome. Female players are similarly redrawn. In this respect the game is not about who you are as much as who you would like to be.

*"....I just want to look badass."*

The performance of the avatars can also vary



from that of their real owner. People in deadend jobs or with limited social opportunities can become more assertive and turn into leaders. There is a satisfaction in achieving in an online game what you are not in a position to achieve in life, and the game tends to become your life. Daily sessions of ten or more hours are not uncommon and it is at this point that the game leaves the area of pleasure and becomes addiction or obsession.

There is a chance to meet other people and get to know them better, but there is a line here that is rarely overstepped. You don't pry into a person's background unless that person reveals information about themselves. Male – female relationships just don't happen unless both players feel the same way. Then one night there is that spontaneous moment when one or the other commits their feelings to the screen. From here the relationship changes. Joining up with your fellow player out in the real world has its own stresses, though – separation by hundreds of miles is a major hurdle. One partner must give up their life to start a new life in a new town. In the environment of a game it's not possible to explore all the facets of another personality. Being together may bring out something that causes friction. In a good match, though, marriage and kids provides a satisfying alternative to online gaming obsession, as we see of one gamer couple. It doesn't always work out, giving rise to the "gaming widow" syndrome. Incidentally we also get to see the geekiest gamer wedding ever. It doesn't always work out, just like any relationship, and the film shows this too.

Meanwhile the online world is a safe place to meet people who have something in common with you in an environment that is often safer than the real world. There is an online anonymity that lets you be more yourself.

In the worst scenario, as shown by one of the players in the film, pleasure becomes addiction, then becomes obsession, which leads to a loss of contact with the real world. Our player is in financial trouble, developing health problems and heading into bankruptcy. In a really bad scenario a very young player develops depression and commits suicide. His mother blames the game, and not any mental weakness her son may already have. The trigger for his problem seems to have been the breakup of a relationship with an online fellow player with whom he was becoming quite intense. This is the sort of negative that newspaper reports thrive on without investigating the background.



We meet players who are trying to break their obsession and regain their health – a junk diet and no exercise takes its toll. The mother of the suicidal boy has formed OnLine Gamers Anonymous – with apparently little or no professional counselling training. Many of her clients profess to want help but are reluctant to stick to her withdrawal plan, including one of the group being followed in the doco. She responds "I cannot be around people who choose to stay sick". Two out of five gamers would quit their day jobs if they could make a living online. Half of the MMO players say they are 'addicted'.

Four out of five players are in a "guild", an online cooperative group that can take on larger more profitable challenges. In a guild they are more than co-players, they are friends. In the Guild they learn cooperation, planning and a respect for their co-players. Often they will arrange offline get-togethers for members. They are comfortable in this social environment since they already know these other people. Being in a guild has its own obligations though – you must be online when the guild plans a coordinated attempt at a prize, or you let your guild down.

*"I had a moment of weakness and allowed myself six to seven hours of sleep" – after an all-weekend gaming session.*

A game developer points out that less than five percent of people in the real world know their own neighbours, so gamers are possibly less socially challenged – they just get their social life in a different way. This tends to give the lie to the stereotype of a gamer being a sad, lonely, socially-challenged individual. An MMO community IS a community, just not what we have been used to. The picture has, as usual, been confused by the concentration on the negatives.



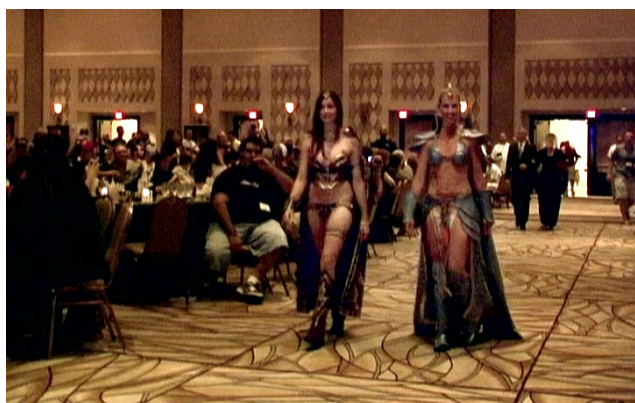
Values in online games are discussed. The object of most games is to recover artifacts or money that will increase your power, defence, or weaponry. The value of an item represents the time it takes to find the object and gain it, usually against strong opposition. This can take many hours of repetitious gameplay as you explore the area of the game or build up your fighting skills to overcome the opposition.

A subculture business, the “gold farmer”, has been spawned where employees gather online objects of value. These are then traded in the real world for real world currency. The farms are popular in third world countries – there are over 100,000 gold farmers in China alone. Other farms exist where the staff will take over your character and develop it for you for real-world money. Real gamers look down on the characters so developed because their lack of hard-won experience soon shows in their performance. Although the farm workers work long hours with only basic breaks, some employers are looking after their staff better with company outings to give them a social life and to encourage the good farmers to keep playing. It also gives the farmers a job in an area where other employment options don't exist.

There are positive stories throughout the documentary, like the disabled young man who can't speak, but can now have a satisfying social interaction online.

“Gaming can be looked at, not as a reflection to the real world, but as a complement to it, like sports teams...”

Extras include a short film of the premiere of the documentary at the South-By-Southwest Film Festival, a “talking heads” discussion of the games, some extended scenes and a commentary by director Juan Carlos Pineiro Escoriaza and producer Peter Brauer.



**Time Team  
2008  
Channel Four  
Television  
Acorn Media Australia  
R4**

One of the more interesting happenings in DVDs in the last five years or so has been the tremendous rise in interest in documentaries. Is it because the viewers are becoming better educated? Is it that they are getting older and want something a little more cerebral than the latest Bruce Willis shootemup? The older-style David Attenborough docos seem to have taken a back seat too. Animals fornicating on the Serengeti plains have been replaced by a wider range of content. The French, particularly, seem to have opened up a new market with their many excellent docos on European history and archaeology.

The British were not left behind either. *Time Team* is an archaeology-based program that covers most of Britain's early history and the people who built it, conquered it or died trying. The series has been running since 1994 and shows no sign of losing its viewers' interest.

Combining education with academia is not an easy task. The show succeeds because the leading academics all have the knack of explaining a complex subject in laymens' terms.

They can show you a coin or an excavated building and put it into context for you. You feel that you understand more about the history of Britain and you pick up some archaeology techniques along the way. I can best describe it as they treat you like a new student and take the time to teach you. A good archaeology story is also a bit like a good detective story as you develop the final story from the clues.





The presenter is Tony Robinson, well known from the Black Adder comedy series and the amazing Worst Jobs documentary series. He leaps about the digs like an hyperactive active little gnome, calling on each digger to explain what they have found and show us what it means.

The rest of the team (the real workers) are Dr Mick Aston, an unassuming fatherly type. Phil Harding is a farmer's son who looks more like a farmer's scarecrow with his scruffy looks and clothes. He is a practical field archaeologist who first came onto the show to demonstrate flint knapping and seems to have just stayed on. His hats are famous.

Raksha Dave is fairly new to the team and seems to spend most of each show at the bottom of a hole she is digging. Stewart Ainsworth is the physics man. His team investigates the "lumps and bumps" of a prospective site and prepares for the fieldwork.

His biggest problem is the diggers who seem to delight in finding that the archaeology is different to his interpretations. Helen Geake is another regular. She holds a PhD but is still prepared to get her hands dirty. To this core group are added many specialists in the field being investigated.

It is also good to see how involved the team becomes with local archaeological groups and even whole villages. I well remember one epi-



sode where investigating an ancient village layout involved dismantling fences and sheds, digging large holes in beautifully trimmed lawns, tearing up the village green and other acts of wholesale vandalism. The entire village joined in enthusiastically.

The show is helped by great overlaid graphics. Watching a castle rise from a row of stones in the ground is quite an experience in CGI. An interesting sideline is the recreation of some of the techniques used by the ancient metalworkers, potters and cooks. This experimental archaeology tests and tries to recreate the early theories and techniques, sometimes with surprising results.

In this four-DVD set we have thirteen of the more significant shows from past series, covering a tremendous range of history. The digs range from Neolithic to World War II, with tantalising titles like "The Naughty Nuns of Northampton" and "Keeping Up With The Georgians". Many of the three-day digs are critically important as the diggers try to keep ahead of the developers or the climate. The episode "Bodies in the Dunes" dealt with a Neolithic and Bronze Age village and burial site in a beach sandhill that was being rapidly eroded by the wind action of storms..

There are many cases of the unexpected. "Street of the Dead" discovered an entire village attached to a Roman fort, far bigger in extent than suspected. Historians knew it must be there, but no one had any idea how huge the site really was.

The set is complemented by extras like biographies of the team members, details of archaeological tools and a timeline.

If you want something different to watch and if you would like a bit of mind stimulation as well, I recommend this series



**Travelling Birds**  
2003, rereleased 2009  
Galatee Films  
Hopscotch (Australia)  
R4 DVD

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

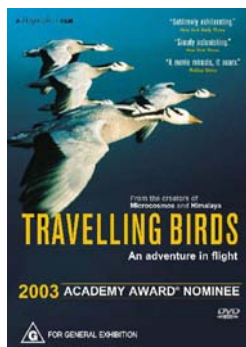
Travelling Birds was originally released in France during 2001 as *Le Peuple Migrateur*.

This documentary is, not surprisingly, about migrating birds. What is surprising is the sheer quality of what could be a rather boring film. It covers the world, not just Europe, and many international film crews have contributed. Quite a lot of the film is of birds in flight taken from the birds' level by cameramen in ultra light aircraft. Young birds had been "imprinted" to be comfortable around the aircraft. This gives the footage and the story a unique perspective.

The story such as it is covers the migration of birds to the Arctic and Antarctic regions during the spring and summer. At these times the areas are a safe and bountiful breeding ground for the birds, although seeing the thousands of birds breeding on near-vertical cliffs makes you wonder how safe they really are. There is a wonderful shot of an adventurous gull chick taking that first step off the cliff and plummeting down into the water. Flies real bad but swims real good. Lets hope its flying technique improved rapidly.

Breeding brings on the strangest mating rituals and this segment of the film provides some hilarious comic relief.

As the colder weather returns in autumn the huge flocks of birds head south again for the warmer climates. This time the trip is not as easy. The birds now carry extra weight and many will fall into the ocean from exhaustion.



Others will perish in bad weather or die crossing the Sahara desert to their starting point in Africa. Still more will fall to hunters as they pause to rest on lakes along the way. Even the warm-water ponds of a steelworks offer a false refuge – the sludge at the edges can trap an unwary and exhausted bird. Some birds fly tremendous distances. The Arctic Tern flies from the Arctic to the Antarctic each year.

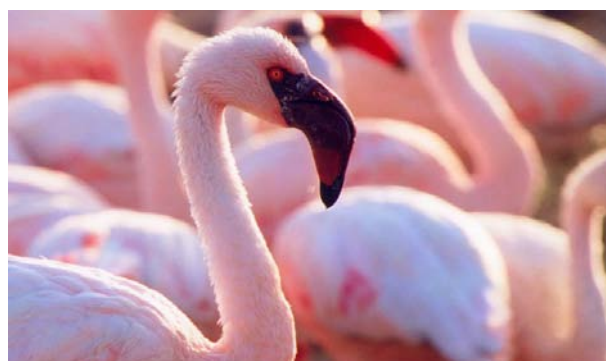
In the Antarctic we see the huge penguin rookeries that form each year. We also see the predators that take advantage of the many chicks, a ready source of food.

The documentary has the minimum of narration, preferring to let the film of the birds carry the story. There are many special moments throughout the film such as the shot of a baby swan rising up through its mother's tail feathers to take its first look at the world, or the baby grebes riding on their mother's back during their first foray on the water.

The birds seem to be natural-born posers and the cinematographers have captured truly great shots. The scenery shots are just as good.

It's spectacular, it's beautiful and it's dramatic. It is one of the best nature documentaries I have seen in a very long while.

The only extra is "The Making Of ..." and we find that over 400 people were involved worldwide. This film is a tribute to their dedication.



# SYNERGY TECH REPORT 1

## WD TV LIVE MEDIA PLAYER

The Synergy Tech Reports will be a regular series covering aspects of the new developing technology of entertainment. Just some of the subjects we have planned include Media Players, music network devices, video processing software, portable media devices, Blu Ray players and portable devices. We will also cover downloadable video and audio formats with focus reports on specific companies who offer unique titles and products. We will open our series with a report on the *Western Digital TV Live Media Player*.

### Western Digital TV Live Media Player

The face of cinema has been changing; it has moved with exponential speed from video (and laserdisc) to DVD and then onto Blu Ray. Each step offering a further improvement in both picture and sound. However, as with music, the issue of portability has always been a concern, extremely high quality product with lots of extras is always marvellous, but what about quick and easy access ? The advent of high speed internet has changed the face of music and is now beginning to do the same with film.

With music the revolution really started with portable cassette players. But it is safe to say it hits its stride with the development of the mp3 format which gave birth to a diverse range players from cheap imports to the beauty of the Ipod.

Along the way came a myriad of formats ranging from ogg to flac; each one offering a different balance of quality and portability. With film the same process has developed but has been hampered by finding the right balance between these two factors.

In the last couple of years formats such as Mp4, high quality divx and various others have made video-on-demand more user friendly. Many firms, especially those at the indie end of the market, have been exploring making available their films available as downloads and this means a new worldwide market for independent cinema without the added cost of duplication, distributors and postage. While many of the larger "downloadable media" conglomerates still cling to the concept of DRM, negative customer reactions and the need for ease of portability between TV, portable players and computers



are slowly giving birth to more open market.

The first stages of downloadable film came with customers simply writing their files to DVD media and using players which were compatible with the new formats. This, once again, brought its own problems, there are lots of formats and players tended to only play a limited range. In addition, there was always the issue of DVD media compatibility and, while companies don't like to talk about it, just how long rewritable media actually last as a storage medium. The last thing you want is to have a large library on DVD-R which slowly becomes inaccessible as the years move on.

Media players provide a useful option but care needs to be taken as specifications and options. Having looked around the market one which constantly seems to stand head and shoulders above the rest is the *Western Digital TV Live*, the first model was quite successful but the latest *WD TV Live* ranks as quite exceptional.

The first thing you notice when you open the box is its size, it measures about 5 cm x 10cm x 5 cm (approximately) and only weighs just over 300 grams. It is a small and compact device yet very powerful, it has two USB ports, one HDMI 1.3 port, optical audio out, Ethernet and composite and component output. It has a nice small remote which does the job and some basic cables. You will need to purchase the HDMI cables and your choice of storage drives separately.

The big question is how easy is it to install and use? It is so simple it is remarkable. Sit the unit by your TV, plug in your cables (we used HDMI), connect your storage device and turn it



on and it is ready to go. If you want to upgrade the firmware it is pretty simple too, simply write the files to the root of your storage device and use the firmware upgrade option on the menu of the device, this will bring your player's software up to date.

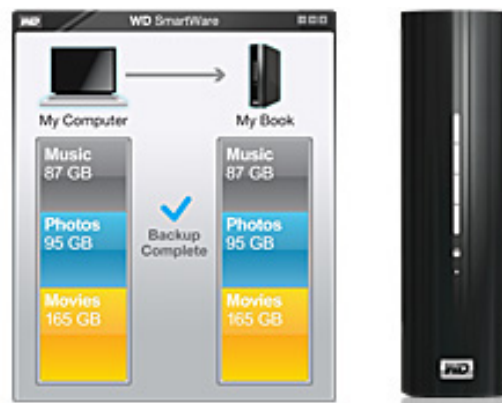
The menu is very easy to use; there is a typical "Windows" like system which offers you the basic options of system settings, photos, music and video. There is quite an extensive list of formats supported covering the majority of photo, audio and video formats. There are also some nice surprises such as Windows Media Video 9 and Apple mov, there is also the high quality Flac format for audio. It also can use SRT, ASS, SSA, SUB and SMI files for subtitles.

While there are lots of USB storage options, ranging from portable drivers through to standard external hard-drives. A prime example are two ranges from Western Digital, *The Passport* and *My Book*. *The Passport* range is very reliable, fast and offers password protection and hardware encryption, focusing on USB 2 means they can instantly link to your *WD TV Live*. They are very portable, small in size and are easy to move from one location to another so work just as well for business as for home media.

At the same time I personally prefer the *My Book* range they are not only elegant in presentation (they look like books and certainly suit a DVD library) but use WD SmartWare software.

This is a visual control center which offers a single screen view of all your data from which you can back up, retrieve, and secure your files. They are available right up to 2 TB in size so can fit lots of media and are very responsive.

The *WD TV Live* can link two of these drives via its USB interfaces and indexes them into its



easy to use interface, which includes a preview mode which shows the file's information and plays the media as well as list and thumbnail views.

When it comes to networking the *WD TV Live* includes various options. You can link it to your network via Ethernet or via a wireless adapter. There is also support for internet access in the form of content from *YouTube*, *Flickr*, *Pandora*, and *Live365*, though some of these have limited access from Australia.

What I especially like about the *WD TV Live* is that it is in a constant state of evolution. There is a well-established online community which discusses using the device, formats, video conversion software. If you are new to the whole new world of online media, then it is a great place to get advice, hints and suggestions.

The *WD TV Live* can open a new world of cinema and while some form of physical medium (DVD, Blu Ray or whatever evolves in the future) is always going to exist (and to be honest for myself be the option of first choice), it is an excellent way to explore the world of indie and genre cinema from the safety of your own home cinema!

### WD TV LIVE GIVEAWAY

A special Thanks to Western Digital for arranging one of these amazing units to giveaway. This is a special "hidden" promotion. If you have read through this issue and found this article then send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with the *WD TV LIVE* in the subject and your name and email in the body of the message. (Australian ONLY entrants please).

We will randomly choose a lucky winner on Feb 20th, 2010. The unit will be sent registered mail.





Booty Babe Art is one man's way of expressing his passion for fantasy art, toys, fashion design, and of course the wonderful variety of female beauty. In effect the project is a tribute to the women that make our day, taking the very definition of "Booty Babe" to new levels.

"What is a 'Booty Babe?'" you may ask. As a term of endearment, a Booty Babe is generally a woman with curves. Waist to hip ratio is usually breath-taking. She's not necessarily run-way model material, in the traditional sense, but she feels sexy and her self-confidence makes her glow. She's not afraid to wear skin-tight outfits – and we love her for it.

Now you're getting the picture. You've seen her at the mall, in line at the bank, grocery shopping, and out dancing. She's sweet and sexy, stylish and smart; and her body language states, "This is who I am, and I LOVE being me."

In 1998, with this in mind, artist Spencer Davis started adding material to an otherwise skinny, 12" fashion doll. Taking cues from Black Tail magazine and a few liberties of his own, the first Booty Babe was conceived.

Over the past few years since, Spencer has exhibited his Booty Babe Art sculptures at numerous art gallery exhibitions in Los Angeles and in Oregon. But this was only the beginning...

After ten years of working in the toy industry Spencer was finally able to "quit the day job" in 2006 to pursue Booty Babe Art full-time. Since the cost of 'setting up shop' in Los Angeles has become prohibitive, Spencer and faithful wife Lili have wandered inland and planted roots in neighbouring Las Vegas, Nevada. With the exceptional growth in internal businesses and the

burgeoning craze in collectible art toys, Booty Babes is able to offer their wares online to the world and include a diverse and exciting range of products.

The vinyl Booty Babes are nothing short of breathtaking. With an eye for detail and a lifelike quality they will amuse, entertain and certainly be the centre of attention.

Free Spirit is an especially nice item, open, free and inviting, but never cheap or nasty, she is a true lovely item.

Chocolate is another cutie, she has frizzy hair, a golden G string and a stretch tank top.

She looks like she has walked out of "*Shaft*" or one of those marvellous Blaxploitation movies.

Free Spirit and Chocolate are sizable items coming in at 11" in height.

They make quite an impression wherever they are displayed.

There are also originals and statues and Spence Davis even makes custom figures. Imagine your partner (or mistress) immortalized as a sculpture !

Booty Babes are playful, erotic, seductive and imaginative. It is well worth visiting the Booty Babe site and seeing what is available.

**Web:** <http://www.bootybabeart.com/>





### Crappy Cat

CrappyCat is by Vanbeater and released by Jamungo.

He is a nine inch vinyl intoxicated feline which comes packed with an almost spent sixer with only one beer left.



The Standard edition is limited to 750 pieces and has a white head and a red suit. The Mono or grey edition is limited to 250 pieces.



The Tuf-Fluck CrappyCat, which I especially like, is black in colour and has a very nice black and grey suit. This edition is limited to 500 pieces.

There is also a cute online CrappyCat game which you can play at <http://www.crappycat.com/>

The various colourways of CrappyCat are available at Wizard Sleeve Toys:

Web: <http://www.wizardsleevetoy.com>

### Galaxy Bunch Chi-bo Range

Web: <http://www.galaxybunch.com/>

*"I believe in the significance of individuality. The individual is ultimately the most valuable and main ingredient of humanity. The characters of Chi-Bo celebrate and reflect the beauty of humor".*

The new toy series by Hong Kong artist Chi-Kit Kwong Chi-bo was recently released at the Taiwan Toy Fair. They are playful and intriguing items which embody some of the uniqueness of the new breed of toys.

There are three toys available: "The Royal Highness", "Space Funky" and "Miracle Shroom" with more to come.

These first toys are ranged from 5 to 6 inches tall, made of vinyl, and are completely non-toxic.



There is a free comic book introducing the character and their backstory with each package.

The Royal Highness has a real Alice in Wonderland look, Miracle Shroom is incredibly quirky and strange and Space Funky is lots of fun looking like some sort of mixed up robot.



Each is very well made and are rather complex items which look a bit vintage or retro with their block-toy like appearance.

Each of the characters have their own story and individuality and Galaxy Bunch is planning to release some sixty different Chi-bots in all. Fifty general release and 10 secret toys.

The Chi-Bo world has been created through three different stories. The Royal Zoo, The Great China Athletic Club and the Old East Town.

All of the figures come from these tales and embody aspects of the ongoing plot, including the quest for Royal highness to reclaim his kingship, a tale of a band of ping-pong players seeking national glory or the nature of urban life.



# Rocket World



Rocket World was founded in 2001 by Patrick York Ma. He was born in Brussels, Belgium and at an early age moved to the U.S. He grew up in the forests and cities on the East

Coast, and then the suburbs on the West. On a whim at 18, he enlisted in the US Army and after shooting and blowing things up, went off to art school. Patrick received his BA in Art at the U.C. Santa Cruz and a MFA in 3D Arts at San Jose State University.

Patrick lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area. In the studio, alongside his awesome crew of creative, subversive rebels, the Rocket World Team work on a variety of projects, and design pretty much whatever they feel like. Rocket World's wide breadth of creations are used and collected all over the world. Rocket World is a designer/artist-centric organization with an emphasis on creating objects and products of only the highest caliber, and in limited quantities where careful control of quality is paramount. They embrace the global marketplace, support their local communities, responsible consumerism, admire and respect intelligence, are wary of the status quo, and value their autonomy.

One of the featured properties at Rocket World is the *Insurgents Wilderness Gruppo*. Conceived in Patrick's sketch book on a Xmas day flight to London in 2000; the I.W.G. are a feisty and rebellious underground group of self-aware animals who were given sentence by a group of mysterious alien beings.

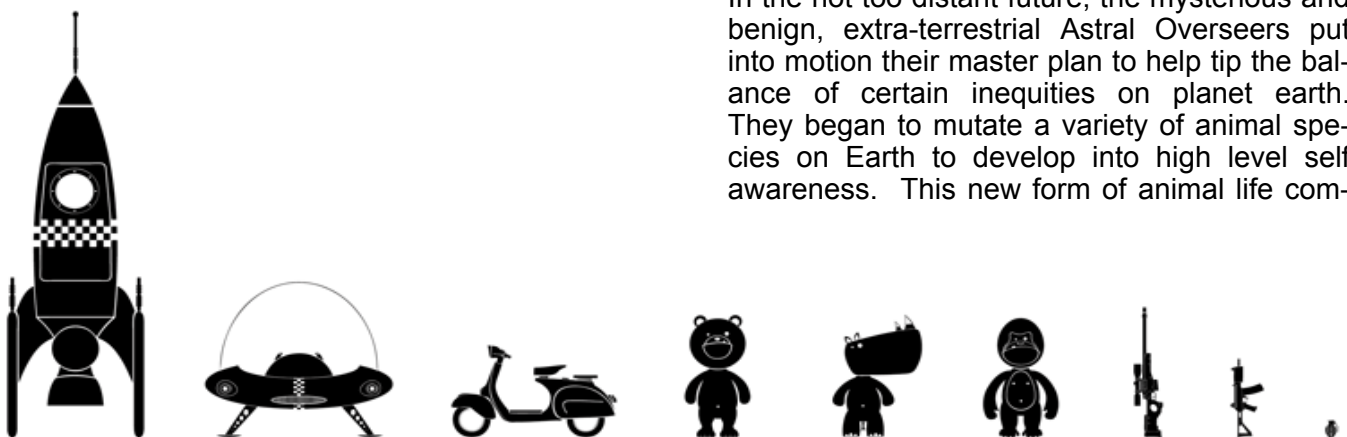
The I.W.G. are organized and have taken-up arms to fight against any humans that have killed, exploited their kind or polluted their habitats. As the I.W.G. adapt to their new-found intelligence, they often struggle with the same temptations and failings of their enemies. The I.W.G. are cute yet decidedly deadly, and their narrative can be described as Che Guevara meets Animal Farm with a dash of 1950's pulp science fiction thrown in for good measure.

Patrick is often inspired by pulp science fiction, military technologies, green sciences, random works of fiction and classic and new animated TV shows featuring anthropomorphic characters, Mid-Century Modern and MOD pop culture.

The I.W.G. are featured under his Rocket World label and a portion of all sales are donated to the various non-profit Wildlife Conservation Groups he supports. His favorite color is green and he often disappears to explore remote corners of the world and helps endangered species.

## Insurgents Wilderness Gruppo

In the not too distant future, the mysterious and benign, extra-terrestrial Astral Overseers put into motion their master plan to help tip the balance of certain inequities on planet earth. They began to mutate a variety of animal species on Earth to develop into high level self awareness. This new form of animal life com-





biners all of their original feral strengths and qualities with intelligence equal to that of humans. Some claim they even have new unique powers.

Immediately gaining a new and more profound understanding of the danger that certain humans presented to their kind, this new breed of sentient creatures remained hidden from human view for years as they developed their own society and culture, albeit somewhat loosely based and culled from observing humans and their media.

An immediate goal for these creatures was to organize, and begin resisting the human destruction and domination of what was once their "natural" habitat. Strangely, as they increased in strength, numbers, and sophistication, their tactics, tastes, and habits were increasingly becoming more "human".

Full of conflict, contradiction, frustration, anger and the desire to save themselves and their world, a resistance movement emerged. The first of these resistance cells was the *"Insurgents Wilderness Gruppo"* . . . .

Just some of the products made available from Rocket World in their IWG range include...



### IWG Flying Saucer Craft

When longer distances need to be traversed in the cold expanse of space, there is the Astro Krieg Flying Saucer Attack Craft which is ready to hunt and engage evil humans anywhere in the galaxy!

The IWG Flying Saucer Attack Craft are equipped with dual Eco-Dyne Laser cannons for lethal engagements in space or on planets. En-

emies of the IWG don't stand a chance. *In space...no one will hear you scream...*

These are truly stunning items, individually boxed, 5" x 5" in size with four colour combinations, Classic Galactic Silver with Ice Clear Bubble Helmet, Moon Glow in the Dark with Ice Clear Canopy (Limited Edition), Covert Space Pirate Black with Laser Green Canopy (Limited Edition) and New World Eco-Green with Laser Orange Canopy (Limited Edition). The craft fits one IWG Astro Krieg Mini Figure (sold separately – see below), Eco-Dyne Death Ray Pistol and a Human Skull Trophy. The detail on these crafts have to be seen to be believed, they are incredibly retro with a real Fifties sci fi feel, at the same time the Krieg Mini Figures give them a very modern ecological edge.

### IWG Astro Krieg Mini Figures

Each Astro Krieg Mini Figure is a perfect fit for the Astro Krieg Flying Saucer Attack Crafts. Titus the Grizzly Bear, Hannibal the Mountain Guerrilla, and Affonso the White Rhino are each available in various Hunter Armored Space Suit colorways and optional accompanying Flying Saucer Attack Craft.

Astro Krieg Mini Figures are ready to hunt humans in space and prevent their spread to new worlds. The armored "Hunter Space Suits" feature a jet pack with pollution free propellants. They are 3.5" in size and come in 3 colour combinations; Classic Galactic Silver with Ice Clear Bubble Helmet, Covert Space Pirate Black with Laser Green Bubble Helmet (Limited Editions) and New World Eco-Green with Laser Orange Bubble Helmet Limited Editions.

They are available as Titus, Hannibal, and Affonso.



Each Astro Krieg Mini Figure comes with his own Eco-Dyne Death Ray Pistol and Human Skull Trophy.

### IWG Movie Icon Series

#### Secret Agent Titus

Secret Agent Titus is ultra-suave and a play-bear with the ladies. He laughs at danger and takes on risky covert missions that no one else will. An excellent shot with his specially modified silenced Walther PPK, a master in hand-to-hand combat, expertly trained in espionage, intelligence gathering techniques, escape and evasion.

When not out saving his world in the name of the IWG, Secret Agent Titus likes to relax with a strawberry milkshake, blended, shaken and stirred...

Titus is an articulated 7" vinyl toy with a custom Mean Terminator Skull display base. He has been only been released in a limited 500 run and comes with his own gun and silencer!

#### Dirty Affonso

"So...you got to ask yourself, do ya feel lucky punk? Well? Do YA?" If you're looking down the barrel of the most powerful handgun in the world and it belongs to Dirty Affonso, your luck has probably run out. Mess with the rhino and you're going to get the horns...or a .44 slug.

Relentless and ruthless, Dirty Affonso will fight dirty if he has to, in the name of justice. When the silly rules just hold you back, they just don't apply anymore....



Dirty Alfonso is an articulated 7" vinyl toy with a custom Mean Terminator Skull display base. He has been released in a 500 run and comes with a 44 Magnum Revolver. (Well, a toy one!)

#### Bullett Hannibal

Bullett Hannibal dislikes self-serving ambitious politicians. He is strong willed and gets the job done even it means breaking the rules and bucking the system. Calm and collected under fire, he handles difficult moments with a cool and reflective stoicism.

All he needs is his wit, charm, and a .38 Special to get the bad guys.

Bullett Hannibal loves his '68 Mustang Fast-back, and with the green Alien technology modified engine, no one has a chance in any car chase....

Bullett is an articulated 7" vinyl toy with a custom Mean Terminator Skull display base. He has also been released in 500 run and comes with a .38 Police Special and shoulder holster rig.



#### IWG Sleepy Bear Titus

Titus the grizzly bear is sleepy. He likes to eat. He likes to use a spork because it's efficient and he thinks it's a clever invention. Human skulls make nice ornaments for home decor.

You think he looks cute and peaceful snoozing away, but if you're a human he doesn't like, he'll eat you. 3.5" in size, 500 run. Sleepy Bear Titus is designed to be displayed laying down or standing up. He includes a spork, combat knife, and human skull trophy.







### I.W.G Rocketship

The mysterious Astral Overseers have given the I.W.G. their own fleet of rocketships to help in their fight against pesky humans!

These highly advanced interplanetary vehicles, fueled by common refuse and garbage, are armed with multiphasic ecodyne death ray laser cannons, deflector shields and cargo area to hold bad human bones. (Which you receive with each model).

The I.W.G. Rocketship playset features a hinged hatch and working LED cockpit light, plus a special limited-edition I.W.G. mini figure and I.W.G. patch which you can wear with pride on your sleeve.

It is about 19 inches tall. and comes with a bonus mini I.W.G. figure -- Taharaka the Rhino for the Eco-Green model or Huey the Black Panther for the Galactic Silver model.

There is also a now OOP edition The Force



Recon Covert Black Special Edition, if you can find one it comes with both figures.

The I.W.G Rocketship is truly amazing, it is such a superbly retro looking product which wouldn't look out of place in a Fifties household ! It comes in rather nice retro looking packaging which is also worth keeping.

The I.W.G Rocket World range is a splendid example of a range brimming with creativity. From rocketships to UFOS, Bears with Guns to mini figures, all with a not too subtle environmental message. A portion of all sales received by Rocketworld are donated to a variety of wildlife conservation groups

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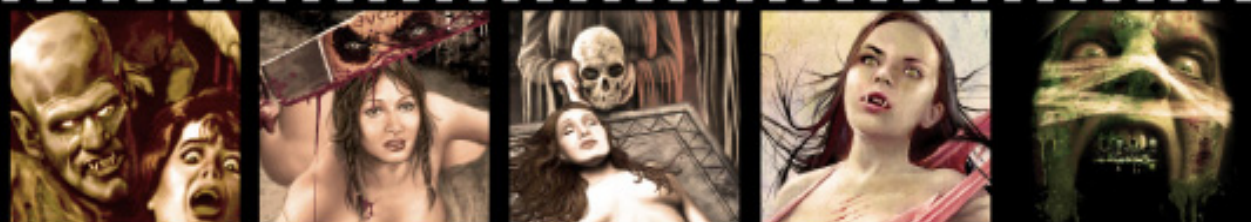
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